

THE CORNHILL



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JOHN MURRAY, 50 ALBEMARLE STREET, LONDON, W.1

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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MAY SARTON, writer, poet and lecturer, is of Belgian extraction but her family is now American. Amongst her books are : *The Bridge of Years*, *Shadow of a Man* (Cresset Press), *A Shower of Summer Days* (Hutchinson), *Faithful are the Wounds* (Gollancz), *The Birth of a Grandfather*.

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CHAPMAN & HALL

Ruth Draper and Her Company of Characters

An Appreciation

BY IRIS ORIGO

'MY wonderful life goes miraculously on.' So she wrote at over seventy, to a friend of thirty years' standing ; and the life she meant was surely not her own, but that of the full company of actors whom, wherever she went, she conjured up beside her. When did she first begin to summon them ? Perhaps she herself could not have said. A cousin, in whose house she often stayed in childhood, recollects that, when she was only eight or ten years old, the other children would gather round her in the nursery at bed-time. "Do the Channel crossing, Ruth !"—"Do Mrs. X !"—"Do Fräulein !" And suddenly, sitting on the edge of her bed, the small girl in a nightgown would call up, for the benefit of her beguiled, bemused, and soon wildly giggling contemporaries, a whole procession of mercilessly delineated, exquisitely absurd grown-ups. A little later, it was the guests in her mother's drawing-room who were portrayed—sometimes for an equally appreciative audience in the sewing-room or pantry. It was from one of these that, fifty years later, when Ruth was playing at the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin, a letter came : 'I'm not surprised at the Posetion you took up, as many a time Bridget Brodrick was trying to control yourself and Master Paul in the Laundry-room with your antics.'

Master Paul was Ruth's brother, the youngest and closest to her in age of the family of eight—Ruth's half-brother and sister, William

Ruth Draper and Her Company of Characters

Kinnicutt and Martha, and then Charles, George, Dorothea, Alice, Ruth and Paul—who lived in Dr. William H. Draper's house in 47th Street, New York. Ruth's grandfather was Charles A. Dana, the publisher and editor of the old *New York Sun*; her father, a brilliant and much-loved doctor; and the guests who came to the house came from the world of letters and music, as well as from that of 'Old New York.' As Ruth grew up, there were visits to museums, to concerts, to the theatre, and then the first parties as a débutante; there were summers at Dark Harbor in Maine—the place which remained, perhaps, the nearest to Ruth's heart, and where, later on, she opened the doors of her house and her heart to her friends, among them those from Italy who had become voluntary exiles during the Fascist years. As bright-eyed and industrious and ruthless as a young squirrel, the girl stored up the inflections and gestures which became her stock in trade. *The German Governess*, *The Children's Party*, *The Boston Art Gallery*, *The Débutante*—all these date from these early, ineradicable memories.

At first, however, it was only at home that Ruth's talents were displayed. "Do something to amuse us, my dear," her mother would say when the conversation flagged after dinner—and at the end of the evening, weak with laughter, the guests would cry, "That child ought to go on the stage!" One of them, the great Paderewski, said it seriously—and it was to him that Ruth listened.

When the Junior League needed talent for a charity performance, it was she who proved so great a draw that soon other charities, too, asked for her help. Again Ruth agreed, gradually adding to her repertoire and attracting a larger audience, but still stipulating that the proceeds were to be sent directly to the charity concerned. It was not until January 29, 1920, that having taken the Aeolian Hall in London, she made her professional début there and filled it to capacity. At last she had become what she had always wished to be—a professional.

From then until thirty-seven years later—until, indeed, only a few hours before her death at the age of seventy-two—the story is one of unbroken triumph. Yet the secret of her vast, her universal, success still remains elusive. How was it possible for this slight, bright-eyed little woman to fill her theatres night after night for forty years, in



Photo : Truda Fleischman

I. RUTH DRAPER AS A WOMAN PRAYING IN A FLORENTINE CHURCH



2. RUTH DRAPER AND HER PROPERTIES



Ruth Draper
Sir John Sargent

Photo : Peter A. Juley & Son

3. 'THE SCOTTISH IMMIGRANT'
Ruth Draper by Sir John Sargent



4. RUTH DRAPER'S COMPANY OF CHARACTERS

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London as in Paris, in New York as in Bangkok, to be applauded by young and old alike, to be appreciated at Windsor Castle and in a Mexican mining-town? How was so complete an illusion created with such slender means?

To a degree, this is always true of the actor's art. 'Every night,' wrote Virginia Woolf, 'when the curtain goes down, the beautiful coloured canvas is rubbed out. What remains is at best only a wavering, insubstantial phantom, a verbal life on the lips of the living.' If this is true in general, it is peculiarly so of Ruth's vivid impersonations. Since the parts she played were only those she had created for herself, she never became identified with any of the symbolic, eternal figures of the stage: she was never Electra, Athalie or Ophelia. Actresses who play these parts—however variously they may interpret them—take on for a season something of the greatness of the minds which first conceived them: the air they breathe is that of Sophocles, Racine, Shakespeare. And when their voice is stilled, their memory is indissolubly bound to the image they brought to life: we say Sarah's Phèdre, and Ellen Terry's Desdemona.

This world Ruth never entered at all. Her talent was on a smaller scale, but it was a gift entirely authentic, absolutely her own—requiring no props, no costumes, no fellow-actors, not even a playwright. Scenery? At the end of the script of her monologues there is a list of her 'stage requirements'—as meagre, surely, as can be found in the history of the stage. For *Doctors and Diets* 'a small rectangular table and a restaurant chair'; for *At the Court of Philip IV*, 'two long, low benches'; for *An Italian Church*, 'a small rush-bottom chair'; for most of the others, nothing at all. Costumes? The photograph reproduced here shows them all—a few hats, mostly rather battered—a dressing-gown, a waterproof and a collection of shawls. These last were her only indispensable accessories: draped in a hundred different ways, they turned her into an old Irishwoman, a young Italian girl in church, a Dalmatian peasant, a great Spanish lady. By Ruth's own desire, they draped her coffin on the day of her funeral.

As she dispensed with props, so she laboriously worked out for herself her own technique, alone—disregarding the advice of even the greatest professionals. "Pourquoi ne faites-vous pas la comédie?" said Sarah Bernhardt sharply, after hearing her. "Mon enfant, ne

Ruth Draper and Her Company of Characters

faites jamais la comédie," said Duse. Ruth thanked them prettily—and went her own way. For one season only, thinking that she might learn something from working in the company of a great actress, she accepted a minor part in one of Marie Tempest's plays. But it was a failure : Ruth became a mere shadow of herself, her whole personality muted. The experiment was never repeated. " My dear," said Henry James, " you have made for yourself a little carpet of your very own. Stand on it."

This was a magnanimous comment, for in 1913—before Ruth had made her name—Henry James had himself written a monologue for her, which she had laid aside. The letter with which the sketch was sent is highly characteristic—and we may perhaps surmise why it was not used, in spite of its author's conviction that it would be just what was required. ' I don't really see,' he wrote, ' why it shouldn't go ; and I seem definitely to " visualise " you and hear you, not to say infinitely admire you very much in it.' And he went on to describe his own view of the character he had drawn.

' It's the fatuous, but *Innocently* fatuous, female compatriot of ours let loose upon a world and a whole order of things, especially this one over here, which she takes so serenely for granted. The little scene represents her being pulled up in due measure ; but there is truth, I think, and which you will bring out, in the small climax of her not being too stupid to recognise things when they are really put to her—as in America they so mostly are *not*. They are put to her over here—and this is a little case of it. She rises to that—by a certain shrewdness in her which seems almost to make a sort of new chance for her to glimmer out—so that she doesn't feel snubbed so very much, or pushed off her pedestal ; but merely perhaps furnished with a new opportunity or attribute. That's the note on which it closes and her last words will take all the pretty saying you can give them. But I needn't carry coals to Newcastle or hints to our Ruth ; who, if she takes to the thing at all, can be trusted to make more out of it by her own little genius than I can begin to suggest.'

But Ruth did not ' take to the thing '—or rather, according to her own account, she tried to force herself into it, but found that she could not. Reluctantly—and no doubt, with some discomfort on both sides—she returned it to its author.

Where then did she find her subject-matter? In everyone she knew. Her sketches are a series of delicate, brilliant, utterly convincing conversation-pieces—in which the only speaker, with many voices, is Ruth herself. For this is what she really cared for: people, daily life. She went round an English garden with her hostess; she sat in an Italian church; she attended a court-room; she spoke to a child in the street. Then she went home, and worked. She worked very hard indeed. ‘I am happy,’ Ellen Terry once wrote to G. B. S., ‘not to be clever,’ and the reason she gave him was that ‘you clever people miss so much.’ Ruth, too, seized the things that the ‘clever people’ so often miss, the thousand tiny details of which daily life is made, which chill or warm the heart. Alone in her room, she imagined the people she wished to portray; she thought about their life, their surroundings, their feelings. Then, when she had lived herself into her subject, she worked before the mirror, experimenting with facial expressions and gestures. Sometimes the preparation of a sketch, before she was satisfied with it, took eight or ten years. It was all done, she once said to my children, by imagination. “Think hard enough about drinking the juice of seven lemons, and you’ll have the right face!”

The script of her monologues was written down, but served merely as an accessory to her memory. The point of her sketches was not in their verbal brilliance—when one came home, there were few sentences that remained in the memory—but rather in the extraordinary accuracy and delicacy of ear, which enabled her to build up, by a thousand imperceptible touches, her finished portraits. Moreover she treated her script merely as a framework. No two performances were precisely the same. A different inflection, an interpolated sentence, a new gesture—these, after forty years of repetition, still kept each part alive.

Her repertory consisted of some thirty-nine sketches in which she played fifty-eight parts—in English, French, German, Italian, with an Irish brogue or a Highland lilt, or in the brilliant invented languages of her ‘imaginary folk-songs’ and of the flower names of her English garden. “Next week my *Funnifelosis* will be in bloom . . . and those darling little pale *Punnyfunkums*. You don’t know the *Punny-funkums*? . . . But my poor *Glubjellas* never came up at all.” She

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took us to an English bazaar, a Southern dance, a porch in a Maine coast village, a New York hospital, a station on the Western Plains, a windswept beach in Normandy ; we shared in a *Class in Greek Poise*, a lunch in a smart New York restaurant, and in the efforts of a whole English village to prepare a country cottage for a soldier's return from the War. Perhaps the most remarkable of her gifts was her power to bring upon the stage, in addition to the part she was playing, a dozen subsidiary characters. In *Three Women and Mr. Clifford*, for instance, Ruth was each of the three women in turn : Mr. Clifford's wife, his secretary, and the woman he loved. He himself never appeared, except through them. Yet most of us would agree with the member of the audience who, on his way out of the theatre, said to his companion : "Wasn't Clifford the most long-suffering jackass in that car ?"—and only a moment later added, "My God, he wasn't there !"

Then there is *The Italian Lesson*. The curtain goes up : we see a smart middle-aged woman in a dressing-gown on a sofa : "Good morning, *Signorina*, good morning. I can't tell you how excited I am that we have come to Dante at last !" The lady, at the moment, is alone ; but within two minutes the stage is so full that we are craning forward in our seats to prevent the baby from falling into the waste-paper basket, to catch the puppy ("Pat him on his head, sweetheart—that's his tail")—to order the dinner ("it isn't fish ? I always thought it was fish. It looks like fish, tastes like fish")—to fill the opera-box ("oh, anyone, so long as it's a man ! No, wait, I picked up a charming young Englishman last week, Sir Basil Something—I put him on a scrap of paper in the blotter")—to design a fancy-dress ("You'll find ten yards of blue chiffon in the sewing-room. The figure of Hope—a lady, blindfolded, listening to someone, sitting on a ball")—to do the shopping ("a very dirty lampshade on the sofa, and on the mantelpiece a pile of yellow taffeta samples," and "from Brentano's, by special messenger, a new book called *Our Inner Life*"). And of course, in between to read Dante. "*Nel mezzo del cammin*—don't you think, *Signorina*, that is what happens to people in the middle of life ? They often become confused. . . ."

All this is done with great *bravura*, in almost rollicking high spirits. We laugh and laugh. It is only when it is over that we realise that

Iris Origo

we have seen the picture of a woman's whole life—filled to overflowing, and as empty as a hollow nut.

Her characters, unlike those of most mimics, are never mere silhouettes : we see them in the round, bearing with them their background, their past and future. How can the effect be conveyed to those who never saw her ? Look at the three figures in the centre of Plate 4—the three women portrayed in *Three Generations*—and imagine Ruth coming onto the stage (completely bare, but for a kitchen chair) as the grandmother—an ugly, squat old woman holding a black shawl tightly round her head ; beneath it, one has a glimpse of sunken cheeks drawn in over a toothless jaw. She has a low, harsh voice and a strong Jewish accent. She lifts a shaking hand. "Good morning, Judge. My name is Anna Abrahams—seventy-nine years old. I live at 64 Orchard Street, with my daughter and granddaughter. . . . Twenty-five years. . . . That's my home."

She has come before the Judge, in a Court of Domestic Relations, to ask him to prevent her granddaughter, who wants to get married and to go out to the West, from putting her, with her daughter, in an old people's home. "I'm an old woman . . . too old to work. And my daughter, she's got heart-trouble and can't work. . . . We couldn't live without Rosie." Harshly, bitterly, she mumbles her complaints of her granddaughter's flightiness, and the irresponsibility of the girl's young man. "She go dance every night, she comes home late. . . . And the young man—he drinks—he make a very bad husband. . . . Rosie she should stay by me. Why she must go away ?" Still mumbling, she sits down.

Then, with a most remarkable dramatic effect, the daughter rises. As she throws the shawl back upon her shoulders, the transformation takes place : in an instant, the stooping, toothless old crone has turned into a tall, middle-aged woman, of dignity and beauty. (One of Ruth's admirers once wrote of her 'genius for assuming physical height—one of the tests of the great ones. The elder Salvini had it, and Irving.') Standing very erect and very still before the Judge, she speaks in a faint, flat voice—without acrimony, but without hope. One of her sons has tuberculosis, the other has run away ; she has heart-trouble and a paralysed arm. "I sent Rosie to business college, so she should have a profession. She has a wonderful job. And

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now, she only wants to go. . . . No, Sir, I don't like this young man. He don't work regular—and he drinks. . . . Please, Judge, tell my girl she should wait. . . . She's so young . . . and she don't understand what life is. . . . And she owes me something."

She too sits down, and now Rosie springs up, flinging off the shawl altogether. She—how is it done?—is youth itself. Her eyes sparkle, her speech is breathless, even the nervous movements of her hands, as she clasps and unclasps them, have the awkward eagerness of youth. What is her name? "Everyone calls me Rosie!" She is a stenographer, she loves her work, she loves her home—"we've got a very nice little home"—but yes, she does want to get married. "I want my mother and grandmother should go to a home for old people—and they don't want to go!" There is indignation in her voice—and also surprise. But she is a *good* girl, that is plain. She loves her mother and her grandmother and she has taken great pains to find a nice place for them. "The house has got four sides to it—there's windows all round—and in the room they're going to give my mother and my grandmother, the window looks straight into a tree. . . . They got cretonne drapes and cushions in the chairs. They got a piano and a radio and a Victor." The old ladies, she says, all seem very contented—"knitting and sitting around." All this is said with offhand kindliness, in a cool, clear young voice. But when she speaks of her young man, her voice changes, it becomes warmer, deeper; she begins to plead. "Judge—I can't give him up. I got to go." They have been offered a job on a Western farm. "You go for four days and nights—and when you get out there's absolutely nothing to see—only earth and sky. . . . No, we don't know nothing about it, but we can learn. We're both young." No, she replies to the Judge's questions, her young man does *not* drink—"Well he drunk some because he was so discouraged, but he won't drink no more when we get married—he told me." No, she did not run about and waste her money. "They've got every penny I earn." Yes, she will miss her mother. "I'll miss her something terrible." But she must get away. "I want to get out of this. I want my own life." And then comes the final, desperate appeal. "Can't you see? They're different! Judge, don't make me stay!"

That is all. The Judge tells her to come back next Wednesday, and

to bring her young man, and we know what the answer will be. Rosie will have her husband and her life. "Come on, Grandma, what's the use of talking now? . . . Come on home."

They go out—and it is only then that we realise that it is only one woman that we have been watching; one woman who, on an empty stage, without even a change of dress, has brought before us old age and middle age and youth—despair and resignation and rebellious hope—whose very bones seem to have changed before our eyes. The woman who could do this was not merely a great mimic, but a woman who loved life and human beings. It was this, I think, above all else, that drew the vast audiences that packed her theatres year after year. 'She is not astonishing you,' wrote Bruce Atkinson, the dramatic critic of the *New York Times*, 'with the brilliance of her talent. She is modestly asking for your interest in various characters, most of whom represented her respect for the human race.' It was this respect which, for all the sharpness of her observation, took the bitterness out of Ruth's mockery. The laughter she aroused was never that which, when its echoes have died down, leaves one feeling chilled and sad: her audiences, at the evening's end, took back with them a taste as sweet and crisp as that of a ripe apple.

They took with them, too,—especially the young and obscure or the elderly and lonely—a certainty that they had found a friend. They thronged into her green-room and went on writing to her for years—letters which touched her more than those of any of her great contemporaries, which she invariably answered and which she kept all her life. The files in which her correspondence is preserved bear witness to these friendships. There are the letters of a little Scottish boy who was waiting for her one day at the stage-door and to whom she went on writing even after he had emigrated to New Zealand, ten years later. There are the notes of an elderly man who writes in the style of her own sketches. 'Yes, that's my name.—Sixty-seven.—Yes, unemployed for the last year. Income? Well, it's two-fifths of what it was before.—Yes, I know I ought to be careful.—Well, I had to go in the Stalls, because I am a bit deaf, and otherwise I should miss a lot.—Inexcusable extravagance? No—it will be something for me to talk about, if I have to come down to sitting by the workhouse fire.'

Ruth Draper and Her Company of Characters

And then there are the letters of Fred B., the owner of a second-hand book barrow in Walworth, who writes to tell Ruth that she is 'a dear sweet lady and the greatest actress in the world,' and who soon becomes a friend, so that she accepts an invitation to see his books. 'I shall have the pleasure of calling for you around 5.30 on Thursday, and if buses too full we'll go by tube to Elephant and Castle and get a tube there. We are working-class and home is humble, but clean and homely, and we are going to get a specially nice tea, with cake and a special treat of Flan.' Ten years later, the friendship still prospers, and Ruth has sent two seats in the stalls to Fred and his wife. 'It's the first time in her 60 years of life that she ever sat in the stalls—but I was myself not quite a stranger to the posh seats.' For Fred, meanwhile, has come up in the world : he has begun to write about his book-collection and has received a cheque for five guineas from *Town and Country*. 'I'm in luck and so I did not go out with my barrow this cold day.' Fred is sure that he will go on writing now—'and you will see your name creep in—sort of, "I remember on one occasion when Ruth Draper was having tea with me. . . ." The proper swank, yet it does get over and astonish people. And they'll say, "Blimey, he knows Ruth Draper. He must be someone"'.



The origins of the drama, in every Western land, are rooted in one great theme : the journey of Everyman between Good and Evil. Ruth Draper's sketches, too—slight as some of them were—followed that great tradition : they too were Morality Plays, stories of Everyman's meeting with Vanity and Passion, with Folly and Despair—but always moving in an ordered, stable world, in which at the last, it is goodness that prevails.

Perhaps it was this belief which enabled Ruth, in spite of her own encounters with anxiety and grief, to preserve all her life what was perhaps her most irresistible gift : her delight. "My wonderful life goes miraculously on." If her audiences rejoiced in her, she was no less enchanted by them. "Weren't they wonderful tonight?" she would say, as she left the theatre—and the same zest endured on this side of the footlights, in the company of her friends. The moment

Iris Origo

would come after dinner when the chairs would be pushed into a semi-circle, and, "Do you really want me to?" Ruth would ask as she rose. "Well—just one before bed-time—which shall it be?" And again, as in her own schoolroom days, young voices—those of the children and grandchildren of her first hearers—would clamour: "Please, please, *The German Governess*!"

Now and again, though not often, a life closes in a manner entirely fitting: the pattern is rounded, complete. To Ruth, whose life had been as active as a bird's, the lean still years of old age would have been unbearable; the generous hands, always extended to give and to gather in, could never have lain folded. When I saw her last, only three months before her death, she told me about her plans for the coming winter; the season she was going to give in New York, in the Playhouse Theatre. For the first time she said how greatly she dreaded the day when she would have to give up her work—but added—"It hasn't quite come yet!" I was reminded then of a passage in Ellen Terry's *Story of My Life* in which she described the celebrations for her 'jubilee,' after fifty years upon the stage. 'Perhaps,' she added, 'my chief joy was that I had not to say goodbye to any of the celebrators. I could still speak to my profession as a fellow-comrade on the active list, and to the public as one still in their service.'

Ruth Draper, too, never left the service of her adoring public. Her last season at the Playhouse began on Christmas night and, in spite of bitter weather, she never had a more brilliant opening. The next day, the Press was as lavish as ever in its praise. 'There is only one Ruth Draper.' On December 29th she gave two performances, but did not admit to any fatigue, and when she came out after the evening show, she drove down Broadway to gaze at the bright lights under the stars. Then, with laughter and applause still ringing in her ears, she went home to bed. When the maid came to wake her the next morning, it was to discover that she had died peacefully in her sleep. She, too, had never had to say goodbye.

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A Prospect of Orchards

BY H. E. BATES

I

MANY years ago I belonged to a young men's club where I used to play chess, read magazines and also box quite frequently, though not very seriously, with a man named Arthur Templeton. We must have been, I think, eighteen or nineteen at the time.

Templeton was a shortish leaden-footed man with weak brown eyes whose responses were those of a duck with its legs tied. His jaw was babyish, smooth and as hairless as a pale pink egg. I had taken up boxing because once, at school, in a playful scuffle, a young ox of a farmer's son had struck me on the chest with a blow of such short-armed ferocity that I was convinced my heart had stopped beating. Soon afterwards I found a friendly ex-policeman who gave me lessons, taught me that the essential art of the game lay in foot-work and in a maxim of six short words : hit, stop, jab and get away. Presently I was practising these principles on Arthur Templeton, to whose pink hairless jaw I sent so many unresisted straight lefts that it became intolerably embarrassing—so embarrassing indeed that I became profoundly sorry for him and gave up boxing altogether.

The friendships of youth are so often impermanent that it is perhaps not surprising that Arthur Templeton's pale pink jaw presently faded from my life with no tremor either of interest or regret. There had been no pleasure whatsoever in boxing with Arthur Templeton, exactly as there can be no pleasure in catching over and over again the same gullible gudgeon from a brook. Arthur Templeton was what is known, popularly, as a glutton for punishment and if I had any reason to be glad about anything between us it was solely because

H. E. Bates

I had decided that the punishment was not, if I could help it, coming from me.

Twenty-five years later I was travelling home on a cold April evening in a train that entered a tunnel and then emerged, some minutes later, into a bright stretch of downland dried stark white by the long drought of spring.

A dazzle of sunlight after the murk of the tunnel suddenly woke life into the eyes of the man sitting opposite me. He inclined towards me a head of pinkish baldness, half holding out his hand.

"I rather think we know each other," he said, "don't we?"

I hesitated; there was, for me, no hope of any clue of recognition except in the brown retiring eyes and the egg-like shaven jaw.

"Templeton. Arthur," he said.

"Good Heavens, of course," I said. "We used to box together."

It is a curious and not uncommon characteristic of rather short men that they seem, if anything, to grow shorter as time goes on. Arthur Templeton, who had entirely ignored my reference to boxing, seemed not merely to have grown shorter; he had grown baldish and fleshy, with the same superciliousness of lip that frequently goes not only with men of short build but also with very fat girls who desperately attempt to conceal, by an intensely aloof proudness of face, the pain and embarrassment of their unhappy figures.

In a strange way Arthur Templeton was not at all unlike one of those fat girls. In a supercilious, aloof, but indeterminate face the one thing about him that had never changed was the pink, egg-like, ever-inviting jaw.

He seemed, I thought, extraordinarily full of confidence too.

"Never hear anything of you," he said. "What are you doing nowadays?"

I told him very briefly what I was doing and I felt it did not impress him. Without comment but with a sharp uppish turn of the head he looked instead at the too-clear sky, greenish now above the setting sun, across the spring-dried hills.

"Looks like another frost."

"Nearly full moon," I said. "What do you do?"

"Fruit," he said. "Apples."

In a fruit-growing district there is hardly anything less exciting

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than a meeting with yet another man who grows apples. But he went on quickly, a moment later :

" Got them on a new system," and then added, again with that supercilious turn of the head, " or it will be when I'm ready. I'm not ready yet."

" What sort of system ? "

" I'm developing an entirely new kind of apple."

I did not comment on this. As I grow older I grow more and more convinced that there are two things the world does not need and can long do without. One is a blue rose ; the other is an entirely new kind of apple. There are some limits, I feel, to an interference with established nature.

The train, at this moment, rushed past an orchard of apple trees, the white smoke whirling and ducking among the black, pink-knotted arms of blossom. I stared at the smoke fading against the setting sun, the low clouds almost the colour of the still unshorn sheep grazing under the boughs, and Arthur Templeton said :

" I don't mean *that* kind of apple." He pointed with a gesture of contempt at the pink aisles of blossom. He seemed to sense, I thought, something of my distrust, if not my scepticism, about an interference with nature. " I don't mean that kind of thing. That's muck."

The apple trees looked, I thought, very beautiful, very delicate in the setting sun, the pink of the half-opened buds strange and sharp against the pale green cooling sky.

" You can produce that stuff by the ton," he said. " Anybody can produce that muck. No, what I mean—"

If I was suddenly arrested into looking at him quickly it was mainly because his voice had become raised. It suddenly squeaked at me.

" No, what I mean"—he suddenly thrust out his pinkish egg-like jaw and I was startled into a half-remorseful recollection of how easily and how often he had presented it to me in just that same way, many years before—" is something absolutely new."

Scepticism, like a troublesome eyelash, is sometimes difficult to remove from the eye in a matter of seconds and his brown eyes became suddenly aggressive, quite fork-like, as they tried to remove the doubt from my own.

" You probably don't believe me but I've very nearly got it," he

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said. "An apple that tastes like a pear—in fact has all the characteristics of a pear but remains a true apple just the same."

Mankind delights in an abundance of useless follies. Not the least of these is the evolution of fruits which take on strange flavours to which they are not entitled, still less suited, and which nobody wants anyway. Perhaps the light of scepticism still glowed in my eye.

"You don't believe it's possible?" he said.

"Oh! anything's possible," I said. "After all, there's a strawberry grape—"

"Not the same thing," he snapped. "Not the same thing at all."

"And isn't there a pea-bean?"

"Entirely different again. Absolutely different. Not the same at all."

"I've even heard of mint flavoured with pineapple—"

With eyes shining brown, unsuspicious, resolved and deadly serious, he looked at me with withering calm.

"You probably haven't gone into this sort of thing very much, have you?"

"I can't say I have."

"Ever hear of a man named Professor Kurt Schumann?"

"No."

"California," he said. "He's been working on the same lines for years. Published several papers. Oh! you can read them. They're interesting. But I believe—"

He broke off the sentence. At this point of the railway line there is a long curve at the end of the gradient where trains begin to brake very hard before running into the next station. As the brakes now went on the train jolted roughly and I thought the jerking movement gave to his apparently confident, supercilious face, taken unawares, a surprising touch of innocence. He looked suddenly insecure.

A moment later, as when he had so often, in the past, offered the pink egg-like jaw for me to hit, I felt intolerably and inexplicably sorry for him.

"Well, this is my stop," he said. "Do you often come down by this train?"

"Fairly often."

"Why don't you hop off and see us some time?" he said. "You

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could quite easily catch the next one down. We're five minutes up the road, that's all. You could see the orchards and the whole place and I'd show you a bit of what I'm doing. We've got quite a nice place up there. Still developing of course—”

The train was stopping. He seemed about to give me a limp, podgy hand. Abruptly he changed his mind, putting on his small green soft hat instead. For some reason the hat made him look shorter than ever. It had a green cord round the brim. It was not unlike the kind of hat you sometimes see men wearing in the alpine villages of Austria. It had a small pink and blue feather in one side.

“ Well, what about it ? ” he said. “ Any day.”

I have often discovered that people on trains who impulsively invite you to visit their homes next time you are passing are almost always considerably surprised and embarrassed when you take them at their word.

“ Well—”

“ Give us a tinkle,” he said. “ If I'm not there my wife will be.”

As I murmured a few faint whispers of half-promises the train stopped. He got out. From the platform he said “ Good-bye. See you anon, perhaps,” and lifted his still apparently supercilious face towards the smoky head of the train.

A few moments later, as the train drew out, I watched him walking, duck-footed, through the ticket barrier, podgy face thrust forward, the chin round, pink and protuberant, almost as if inviting some kind of punishment from the frosting sky.

2

It is more than likely that Arthur Templeton might have faded with insignificance from my life for a second time if it had not been that, two evenings later, my telephone rang and a woman's voice, piercing as a drill, asked if it could speak to me.

“ Speaking,” I said.

“ Oh ! hullo,” she said. “ It's Valerie.”

I could not recall, at that moment, anyone by the name of Valerie.

“ Valerie Templeton. Arthur's wife,” she said. “ Hullo, are you there ? ”

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"Yes, I'm here."

"Oh! good, I thought you'd gone. Did I surprise you?"
She had surprised me.

"I wondered if I would," she said. "Don't you remember me?"
I did not remember her.

"That's partly Arthur's fault for not telling you," she said. "But then he wouldn't. Hopeless to expect it. You know Arthur, don't you?"

The fact that I hardly knew him at all kept me locked in puzzled silence again.

This silence was presently broken by a fluffy giggle, less piercing but more forbidding than the speaking voice itself, that seemed to me like a nervous attempt to be something more than friendly.

"I believe you're kidding. You're putting it all on," she said.
"You mean you don't remember the Pendlebury sisters?"

In a flash, across twenty-five years of time, I remembered the three Pendlebury sisters. They were fair-haired and very plump. They had faces like damp white cushions.

"Of course," I said. "Of course."

"Well, I'm Valerie," she said. "The musical one. Have you got me now?"

I had got her now, but the fact kept me silent again.

"Aren't you rather musical too?" she said.

"I'm very fond of music."

"Well, that's what I really rang about," she said. "We know quite a few musical people here. Quite a circle of us. Not a lot of course—there aren't a lot, are there? You know what I mean? Well, not when you're stuck in the country anyway."

I had not time to think what she meant before she went on:

"Would you like to drop in one evening on your way down from town? Arthur said you might. We sometimes have concerts."

"Yes, he asked me," I said. "He wanted me to drop in and look at the experiments."

"The *what*?"

The voice pierced my ear-drums so effectively that I was glad to use it as an excuse that I hadn't heard.

"He wanted me to look at the farm and——"

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"What about Tuesday?" she said. "If you came down on the five-fifteen?"

I said something about not being quite sure about Tuesday.

"Well, try," she said. "I'm dying to renew old acquaintance." The fluffy, intimate giggle tripped about my ear for the second time. "Any time. Just drop in. It would be awfully nice. No ceremony at all. Open house and that sort of thing."

The following Tuesday evening, as I left the train and walked along the side of the valley towards Arthur Templeton's house, it seemed that every orchard was in bloom. It was very warm for April and under a white-blue sky blackbirds were singing with choking, thrilling richness among miles of pink and snowy boughs. There are springs of accidental perfection when, for a few days, all the blossom of all the orchards meets, cherry and apple and plum and pear, like a great lacy gathering of cloud; and this was one of them.

Foolishly I had neglected to ask the name of the Templeton house and when I stopped at the first neat, well-ordered farm standing at the fringe of a wide apron of blossoming cherries a heathery tweed-coated man came out of a barn to tell me, rather testily, I thought:

"Next one up the road. Can't miss it. One with the gas-tarred barn."

Unlike Housman I am not sure which is the loveliest of trees; and as I walked up the road, between black-boughed cherries on one side and the pink up-curled horns of apple branches on the other, I felt as much impressed by the orderliness in everything, by the strictly-pruned sentinels everywhere lined up in the April evening sun, as I did by the clouds of gathered blossom folded into every corner of the little valley.

Then I came, suddenly, on the gas-tarred barn. It had something of the appearance of a battered black saucepan with a makeshift lid of corrugated iron, three parts rusty, that had been tossed on top of it by a fluky throw. Some parts of it hung perilously over the western eave ready to fall. Below it a pile of rock, half-hidden by rising nettles, had wrecked a wooden trailer, turning it upside down, revealing a hole in its belly through which, presently, nettles too would rise.

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Beyond all this the house struck me as being rather like a ship stranded on a muddy shore. Its upper structure, of thin weather-board, was flaky white ; the plimsoll line of red lower brick actually had in it two round portholes of thick green glass on either side of a half-glass door.

Up one wall of the house grew a vast espalier pear-tree that in its pruned stiffness was exactly like some compound arrangement of ladders for scaling the side of a ship. It was the only orderly thing in sight. All along its black, scaly branches there was not a single spray of flower.

When there was no answer to my third ring at the door-bell I started to wander about the farm-yard. I had in mind to look for the seat of Arthur Templeton's experiments, for the system, well-ordered but revolutionary, by which apples would be married to pears and in time produce a sweeter, different progeny, but warm odours low on the April air led me to an arrangement of pig-sties, hideous as concrete pill-boxes left over from an abandoned war, ranged between a duck pond and a clump of elder trees.

Two pale pink sows stood up to their shoulders in dung-steeped straw and contemplated me. A few white ducks were shovelling about the mud on the banks of the pond. If they inspired in me a thought of Arthur Templeton it was not through motives of vindictiveness. I was simply wondering where he was.

Presently, glancing round at a small orchard of apples, haphazardly filled in with young plums where wind or man had removed an older tree, I caught sight, out of the corner of my eye, of a figure who did not seem to belong to this scene.

It was a big, chunky man with gingerish hair and a red bow tie, hatless, who was carrying a 'cello in a brown canvas case. We exchanged a silent, distant, not unhostile stare before he hurried across the concrete and, without knocking, disappeared through the front door of the house.

His arrival became the signal, two minutes later, for my own moment of recognition. Across the yard, towards the pig-sties, came the hurried fluffy giggle I had heard twice or more on the telephone.

"Well, there you are ! Haven't changed a bit. I'd have known you anywhere."

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This was more than I could say of Valerie Templeton.

" Didn't you ring ? " She was wearing spectacles with rims of exceptionally pale golden tortoiseshell, almost the colour of honey. " I didn't hear you. I was probably practising."

I said I had rung ; the fluffy giggle was all the answer she gave me for another twenty seconds or so, during which she held out both hands, clasping my right one.

" Nice to see you," she said. " Damn nice. Really damn nice. How long has it been ? "

If I did not answer this question in terms of specific years it was not only because I could not remember but because I was arrested, indeed astonished, by Valerie Templeton.

With the years Arthur Templeton, who in my youth had been short, weak-eyed and full of hesitancy, had grown fattish, supercilious and seemingly full of confidence. His wife, who like her two sisters had once had a face like a white plush cushion, had lost all trace of that upholstered appearance that was all I could remember of her girlhood except her long fair hair. Now the hair was piled into tiers of little watch-spring curls above a face whose cheek-bones were like pared clenched knuckles. The flesh had the shining prettiness of wax, the same unreal, doll-like air, and the eyes were hungry.

" I was looking for Arthur," I said.

" Oh ! you know Arthur," she said. " Vague as they make them. He's gone into the town about some pigs or something. Probably forgotten you were ever coming."

She turned on me a deliberately fascinating smile, flashing the honey-rimmed spectacles. Her mouth and her teeth, I noticed, were rather large, and perhaps it was this that gave her giggle its fluffy but unsoothing sound.

" More than you can accuse me of," she said. " I've been thinking about you all day. You know—wondering."

If I had known her better I might have thought she was trying to mock at me. She lifted her head and threw it slightly backwards and the gesture, like a pulled lever, released the giggle once again.

" Well, come in anyway," she said. " Arthur may be years. We're just having a snifter and then we're going to try the Dvořák. You know the one I mean ? " With closed mouth she hummed

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some bars of the piece I did not recognise. "The Quintet," she said. "Tum-ti-tum-ti—you know, and then that typical Dvořák lilt—tah!—you know what I mean? Damn difficult though. Hell to play."

The interior of the house, first in an entrance hall crowded in every corner with stained mackintoshes, muddy gum-boots, baskets and several sacks that might have held samples of Arthur Templeton's apples, and then in a long sitting-room furnished in dusty brown coco-matting, with chairs and settees loose-covered in bright orange linen and piled with many pink and purple velvet cushions, had the same shabby gimcrack air as the yard outside. A big tobacco-brown pseudo-baronial sideboard, littered with sheets of music, stood against one wall. A black, oddly compressed baby grand seemed to cower in the opposite corner—cower, I think, is the appropriate word, for the entire bulk of the chunky 'cello-player was sprawled weightily across it, as across a bar.

After the 'cello-player, who was drinking whisky, had been introduced to me as "Sandy—he's the unlucky one because the 'cello part's absolute murder, but you know it, don't you?" two more people arrived. Both were carrying fiddles.

It would have been hard to detect, at first glance, whether they were men or women except for the fact that one of them sported a tender, light fawn beard. A premature baldness at the temples threw into relief the heavy side curls of his hair. The sunken washed blue eyes gave him an air of sickness over which Valerie Templeton fussed with solicitude, mothering him with giggles as she unravelled the big thick red scarf that had coiled itself about his thin neck like a scarlet python.

"Thought you two were never coming," she said. "Bet you dawdled in the bushes on the way, didn't you? Iris Bensted!—come clean."

If there was the slightest chance of Iris Bensted coming clean I did not detect it. She turned on the rest of us a pair of remote dark eyes as unmoved and glistening as a cow's. Her black hair was cut monkishly, in a low fringe that, trimmed as with the aid of a basin, reached to within an inch of her thick rough brows.

The fact that she was wearing a heavy cable-stitch sweater in

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bright green and black loose trousers accounted for my not being able to determine, with immediate certainty, what her sex was.

"Well, drinks for everybody, Sandy," Valerie Thompson said, "come on. Pour out, sweetheart."

After laboriously detaching himself from the baby grand the 'cello-player poured, in a muffled, sloppy sort of way, drinks for the rest of us and presently we were standing about the room with glasses in our hands, I in a world that had taken me slightly by surprise and in which I found myself constantly wondering, and with growing depression, where Arthur Templeton could be.

"Well, I suppose we ought to make a bash at it," Valerie Templeton said once and I assumed this meant the music. "Sometimes I don't know why we chose the damn Dvořák. It's stinking difficult. Maddening. Absolute hell. Do you think we're bats to take it on?" she said to me. "Do you? Or what?"

No answers, I discovered, were expected to these questions, for the simple reason that Valerie Templeton always provided them, in the shape of her fluffy nervous giggles, herself.

Twilight was almost upon us before the tuning of strings began. Outside, somewhere in the region of the orchard, a blackbird was still singing—heard, I think, by no one but myself as I went to shut a casement window in answer to Valerie Templeton's abrupt demand:

"Somebody shut the window, please. It's getting chilly."

A second or so before shutting the casement I thought I caught sight of a light in the barn across the yard. Falling darkness was shutting out the sprinkled knots of blossom on the rows of ill-pruned apple trees and a few moments later the closing of the window shut out altogether the last, rapturous singing of the blackbird.

Turning back to the room I found Valerie Templeton switching on the light and heard her say, with a sort of half-aggrieved note of apology to me :

"Don't know if you'll be able to bear it. You see we have to play the damn thing as a quartet—haven't got a blasted viola yet. Sandy—did you see that girl? Is she coming, do you know?"

"Sunday," he said.

If the need had been for a double-bass the lugubrious mutterings

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of the red-bowed 'cello-player would have provided it as he sat, softly belching whisky, tuning his strings.

"Let's hope to God she's good," Valerie Templeton said.

"Let's hope to God she comes," the 'cello-player said, "or else we'll have to get the cat in."

"*You* don't play the viola, do you?" she said to me. "Too much to hope, I suppose?"

"Too much," I said.

I sat listening, for some forty minutes longer, to the rattling of the quintet's partly assembled skeleton. Valerie Templeton played the piano like a hen pecking at a bowl of maize. In all her hungry, crouching, spectacled actions above the cowering little grand piano there was an aggressive sinewy desperation.

At ten o'clock, my mind on the last train home, I rose to go.

"Oh! must you? Was it hell? God, I bet we've bored you." She started pulling with nervous brittleness at the joints of her fingers, as if chastising them for being responsible for the noises I had heard. "Pity Arthur wasn't here. You could have nattered with Arthur."

"Where is Arthur?" I said.

"Search me," she said. "You know Arthur."

"Perhaps experimenting," I said.

"This is the second time I've heard about these experiments," she said. "What's it all about?"

"Search me," I said.

She laughed at that, rather sharply I thought, and then, in spite of my protests, she came to the door to say good-night to me. In the hall she turned on me the glittering honey rims of her spectacles and said:

"Too much to hope you'll drop in again, I suppose? You've had a bore of an evening—honest, haven't you?"

"Not a bit," I said. "Fascinating."

"Well, drop in whenever you like," she said. "You will, won't you?" She raised her hands in the beginnings of a flutter of invitation, smiling open-mouthed, so that for a moment I was almost sure she was about to flirt with me. I was mistaken. "After all one's got to meet somebody now and then besides *that* crowd." She made

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a gesture back towards the sitting-room, where all was silent now.
“One’s got to *live*, hasn’t one?—if you know what I mean.”

Outside, in the April darkness, the blackbird had stopped its singing. The apple boughs were invisible beyond the pond. Across the yard the only glimmer of light came in a few yellow perpendicular pencil cracks through the timbers of the gas-tarred barn.

I crossed the yard, pushed open the half-fastened door of the barn and looked inside.

Sitting on a box, in the light of a hurricane lamp, crouching over a bed of straw on which stretched a shadowy figure I found for a moment or two difficult to identify, sat Arthur Templeton.

“There you are,” I said. “Just going. Sorry I missed you.”

“Caught me at a bad time,” he said. “Been running all over the place for a vet and couldn’t find one.”

From among the straw came a grunt or two that reminded me for a moment of the mutterings of the ‘cello-player. A ripple of pink-white legs against a barrel of ruckled teats solved for me, a moment later, the brief mystery of Arthur Templeton’s vigil and he said :

“Have to watch her. Not sure there isn’t another one.”

At the same time he turned towards me the unresisting weak brown eyes, no longer supercilious but remarkable placid now in the lamp-light, into which I had so often looked when we had boxed together and which had made me so intolerably embarrassed and often so intolerably sad for him.

“Don’t suppose you’ll drop in again?” he said. “Like to show you——”

“Perhaps next week,” I said.

He was still smiling as I crept out. Outside not a whisper of a sound broke the April night silence above the orchards, the boughs of which grew whiter and whiter as my eyes became accustomed to a darkness in which I walked slowly, brooding more and more on Arthur Templeton, crouched in the lamplight, bringing pigs into the world.

When I next called at the Templetons' house, about a week later, it was raining hard. Everywhere blossom was falling from the apple trees. The valley that with its many orchards had looked so like a delicate encampment of cloud had now begun to look soiled and ragged under drenching evening rain.

There is something intangibly melancholy in the first vanishing of spring blossom and perhaps it was this, combined with the dry scratching of strings from the house, that made me wish I hadn't called. In vain I looked into the gas-tarred barn across the farm-yard, hoping to see Arthur Templeton inside it, mothering his little pigs or perhaps—an even vainer hope—engaged in marrying the apple to the pear. All the sounds and movements I found there came solely from the flood of water pouring down from a roof hole on to the wheel of an ancient hay-cutter and dripping from there to a rusty hip-bath half full of sprouting swedes.

I need not have worried, as it happened, about the intangible melancholy of the April evening permeating the heart of anyone but myself. I am perhaps over-sensitive to the moods of earth and rain. I ought to have been prepared for the fact that there are people who eagerly grasp at the enclosing shrouds of sodden English evenings as heaven-sent excuses for romping jollity.

In the house, in fact, the Templetons were holding a party—or at least Mrs. Templeton was. The sound of strings came from Iris Bensted's fiddle. She was being helped by the bearded fellow fiddle-player, now vamping at the piano. On the floor, from which the dusty coco-matting had been dragged back, several couples, including the 'cello-player and Valerie Templeton, in a brilliant emerald dress, were dancing.

"Ah! there you are!" Seeing me, she disengaged herself from the embraces of the 'cello-player and came tripping across the floor, locking and unlocking nervous welcoming fingers. "You see, I told you it was a surprise, didn't I?"

This remark referred to a telephone conversation of the previous day in which she had urged on me the necessity of being an absolute

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dear and dropping in on them—"because it's going to be a surprise, dear, and I think you'll like it."

"It's my birthday!" she now said to me. "And there's me and my candles!"

With gay imprecision she flung her arms about the air, directing my glance to the baronial sideboard, on which stood an iced birthday cake of astounding appearance which I thought for a moment had actually been made of painted cardboard.

"Do you like it? or do you think it's *terrible*?"

Gazing at this strange object, the cake, I did not know what to say. The icing had been coloured a livid vitriolic blue. Round it were set, in a double arc, numbers of bright magenta candles.

I was saved from making any comment on this by Valerie Templeton's hand suddenly clutching at my sleeve.

"You're wringing wet!" she said. "You walked up in the rain. Where was your overcoat?"

"It was fine when I left for town this morning—"

"You'd better come upstairs and dry off or you'll catch your death or something. Your hair's all wet too. Silly man— Look at your hair."

I started to say something about the difficulties of looking at your own hair but in her adamant, challenging, desperate fashion she seized my arm and led me away.

Upstairs we spent ten ruffled, uncomfortable, conflicting minutes in the bathroom.

"Rub your hair hard with this warm towel. I'll dry your jacket. It's not through to your shoulders, is it?"

I begged her several times not to fuss with me but she took no notice and presently she insisted I took my jacket off. After this she ran her hands over the shoulders of my shirt, then over the cuffs and the collar.

Presently, still towelling my hair, I stood facing her.

"You look funny with your hair all ruffled," she said.

"Naturally."

I was annoyed; I spoke acidly; and she smiled at me.

"I mean funny nice."

"Whatever that may mean."

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She laughed again, not quite so fluffily as she did sometimes, but in a lower voice, more smoothly.

"I hoped it might mean you'd give me a birthday kiss."

"What gave you that idea?"

"You're funny. You're awfully nice," she said. "You always were."

The retreat from kisses he does not want is one of the unpleasantest things that can happen to a man. I began to be angry.

"Do your eyes always go that bright blue colour when you're angry?" she said.

"I'm not angry," I said. "Nor is my head quite so wet as you think it is."

"That was good. You were always quick-witted."

I started savagely to comb my hair. She laughed and tried to take the comb away.

"Kiss me," she said. "Come on, kiss me."

"Now look, let's get downstairs——"

"Kiss me," she said and it was hard to tell whether her voice was wild or miserable, or, like her eyes, simply desperate with hunger.

"Come on, be a sport. Kiss me. Just once. Be a sport. Show me how you——"

What followed was so impossibly absurd that I can only describe it, if the simile is not too ridiculous, as trying to avoid being caressed by a mule that is at the same time frantically struggling to kick over the traces. We rocked, stupid and dishevelled, about the bathroom. She aimed a whole volley of vindictively amorous kisses at my face and laughed unflinchingly, showing her quivering tongue.

"Be a sport. My God," she kept saying, "you and me could have fun."

"Have fun with Arthur!" I said.

It was suddenly as if I had translated into action precisely what I had in mind to do to her. If I had suddenly held her silly face under the cold bath-tap I could not have shocked her more completely to her senses.

"My God, my God, Arthur," she said. "Arthur! Arthur!"

She stood looking at me with a mixture of pity, contempt, misery—all sorts of things. She even laughed again. The vindictively amorous hunger faded in a second, completely.

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"Better get back to the party," she said.

She picked up my jacket from the floor and gave it back to me.

I put it on. "Now you're talking sense," I said. "Why didn't you say that before?"

She didn't answer. I brushed my hand across the damp lapels of my jacket and buttoned it up.

"Damn it," I said. "Arthur's a good sort."

From behind the honey rims of the spectacles she stood looking at me in a final moment of supremely miserable, withering calm.

"Good sort? What do you know about it?" she said. "Good sort?—that's what the road to hell's paved with—good sorts."

We had scarcely been downstairs for a quarter of a minute before we were confronted by a dutiful Arthur Templeton, the good sort, holding an empty tray.

"Drink?"

Before I could answer his question she was rasping at him:

"Of course he wants a drink! Don't be so woolly. What do you think he wants?—the evening paper or something? What's the use of prancing about with an empty tray?"

He took this searing punishment like a lamb.

"Gin, whisky or a glass of red wine?"

"Glass of wine, Arthur, thanks," I said.

To my surprise, as Arthur retreated, she became her old giggling self again.

"I knew you were a red wine man," she said. "You can see it in your eye."

A minute later, Arthur Templeton came back, bearing a glass of cold red wine in his hand.

"Oh! grip, Arthur, grip!" she said. "First the tray without the glass. Now the glass without the tray!"

"Sorry," Arthur said to me and held out not only the glass but that smooth inviting jaw, supercilious no longer, which I had struck so often many years before.

"I wanted something different," she said. It was lost on me for a moment, as I watched Arthur Templeton retreating, duck-footed, among the dancers, that she was referring yet again to the cake on the

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sideboard. "I get so tired of white, don't you? Everybody gets so stuck in awful ruts, don't they? Don't you always think it looks like a starched shirt-front, that white icing—so terribly chapel-and-church?"

I was about to admit that there was some truth in this when she waved her indecisive hands again, giggling with a voice that flapped featherily, and said:

"You know a few people, don't you? You don't want to be introduced all over the place, do you? We don't want to be formal, do we? If you get stuck with anybody ghastly make signals and I'll come and rescue."

"I'll probably talk to Arthur," I said.

"God, what a prospect," she said. From behind her honey rims she darted arrowing glances about the room and its crowd of dancers, as if seeking someone who would save me from this fate. "Oh! I know—you haven't met the kid yet. The viola-player. That's her—over there, talking to Sandy."

A girl of perhaps nineteen or twenty, pretty, fair-haired, with a golden plum-like skin, looking not at all unlike the Valerie Templeton I remembered from the years when I boxed with Arthur, stood leaning against the far wall, talking to the 'cello-player.

"She isn't bad," Valerie Templeton said. "She's a pupil of Sandy's—of course he couldn't teach pussy, but the poor devil's got to live, I suppose. Come on, let's drag him away—he's breathing all over her."

She needed no assistance, I noticed, in dragging the 'cello-player away.

"Come on, you coarse brute," she said playfully. "Come and dance with me."

In an atmosphere of stringy pandemonium I talked, for the next fifteen or twenty minutes, to the girl who played the viola. Anthea Barlow was her name. I had not been mistaken in thinking that on her fair soft skin there was a downy plum-like bloom. Her eyes too had a surface of tenderest limpidity through which the pupils shone with disarming brilliance—innocent as forget-me-nots, or so it seemed to me.

As I struggled to make small conversation about music she turned these eyes on me with continually mounting surprise.

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"Oh! really," she would say. "Do you think so? I never thought of that. Isn't that interesting?"

I had just begun to think of making the necessary signals to Valerie Templeton when Arthur arrived.

"Gin, whisky or red wine?"

His simple catechism having been repeated, he stood back, staring at the girl, his hands twisting at his empty tray.

"Well, I don't really know," the girl began to say and then hesitated, turning on him the eyes of forget-me-not innocence, as if in appeal.

"Do you think I might have orange?"

"Orange," he said, "of course. At least I think so."

"Is it an awful trouble?"

"Oh! no," he said. "Oh! no. Fresh orange or bottle? No trouble."

"Would there be fresh?" she said.

"Oh! I'm sure there is," he said. "I'm sure—certain there must be."

He retreated, face still towards us for some paces, as I remembered him so often retreating across the canvas of the boxing ring many years before.

"Are you sure it isn't an awful bother?" she called after him.

He simply went, not answering. It could not conceivably have been his first meeting with her or his first glance into those almost too blue, too innocent eyes of disarming tenderness, but I thought I caught in his retreating, suddenly suffocated eyes a look of stupefaction.

He was back in five minutes, eager as a lackey expecting a tip, bearing a long glass of crushed fresh orange juice, a basin of sugar and several straws on a tray.

"Hope I haven't been too long," he said.

There was no suggestion of pity in her long, smiling glance at him. Nor did her eyes turn on him with that wide and mounting surprise she had exercised on me. I could see, instead, that she was greatly flattered by what she saw.

"Something else I can get you?" he said. "There are some quite decent sandwiches. *Foie gras*, I think. Shall I go and see? Or would you rather have ham?"

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"Would it be an awful—"

He went like a shot, not waiting for an answer. With blue eyes downcast and seemingly more than ever innocent, she sucked at orange juice through a pair of straws. An uncomfortable suspicion that she did not know what *foie gras* was entered my mind and leapt out again, still more uncomfortably, an instant later. And it was like a mere mocking echo of it when I heard him say :

"Terribly sorry. They weren't *foie gras*. They're smoked trout *pâté*. I brought some along—"

"Oh ! Do you mind after all ?" she said. "I'd really rather have ham."

He had hardly finished the third of these dutiful errands for her when the shrill voice of Valerie Templeton began urgently calling him, piercing as a drill above the dance music, to attend to one of her own. He obeyed that call too with his strange, unhesitant, duck-footed alacrity.

When he had retreated again the forget-me-not eyes turned themselves on me as transparent as beads of glass.

"He's a lamb," she said.

It might have been not inappropriate, I thought, if she'd called him a dog.

"Have you known him long ?"

"No," I said.

"I had an idea you knew him quite well."

"Hardly at all," I said.

"Oh ! really," she said. "How interesting."

The evening offered no opportunity to know him better—except for one swift and tiny incident the significance of which, an hour later, very nearly escaped me.

"Cake being cut ! Cake being cut !" I heard several voices call.
"Matches, somebody ! Candles !"

This time, oppressed by the growing warmth of a room stuffy with dancers, I had gone to open a window, not to close one. To my surprise the rain had stopped. In a calm, cuckoo-less April darkness only the last dribblings of a leaking gutter and the running of a ditch somewhere over against the pond broke the silence below a sky pricked with almost frosty stars.

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I turned from this scene of fresh and scintillating air to see a handful of flame rising like the burners of a blue gas-ring in the middle of the baronial sideboard. Somebody had switched the electric lights out and Valerie Templeton's birthday candles were all the illumination—their flames pretty as crocuses on slender magenta stems—that now broke the darkness of the room.

"One good puff!" somebody was shouting. "Deep breath! Now!"

A fluffy hurricane, part giggle, part expiration, swept about the candle flames, making them flutter sideways like golden flags. About half of Valerie Templeton's forty-five years were extinguished in a single second. The rest rallied, uprighted themselves and burned unquenchably on.

The beginning of a witty quip about a woman's age was drowned in sudden laughter. The lights went up. A few moments later Valerie Templeton, over-flushed, her indecisive hands held steady by the hairy paw of the 'cello-player, was cutting into the blue crust of the birthday cake, among the ring of half-black, half-flaming candles.

"Happy birthday!" several people shouted. There were waves of laughter. "Jolly good luck!"

The knife made a sudden slip against the side of the cake's blue and brittle decorations and in laughing disgust Valerie Templeton threw it on the sideboard, uplifting at the same time a pair of tipsy arms that the 'cello-player a moment later folded to his shoulders, on which she in turn laid a head of golden watchspring curls, slightly ruffled, to be borne away to dancing.

Among all these incidents not one surprised me. It was only some ten or fifteen minutes later, when every guest had toyed or was toying with a segment of blue-edged birthday cake, that I looked across the room to see Arthur Templeton engaged on yet another errand of mercy, carrying a plate of cake to Anthea Barlow, the viola-player, still standing apart in the corner of the room.

I was too far away, in that moment, to hear what comment she offered as Arthur Templeton stood before her, like a servant placing a long-awaited offering under a pair of too bright eyes, but I could see that she hesitated.

He greeted this hesitation with an eager outward thrust of the

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jaw. I saw her mouth move in return, first with words, then with the fraction of a smile, and a moment later he was on the run again, bearing the plate away.

Half a minute later I pressed my way among the dancers and past the sideboard. With bent head Arthur Templeton was engaged in an absorbed meticulous task there, a knife in his hand.

In the light of two or three of Valerie Templeton's still-remaining, still-burning candles he was engaged in paring from a wedge of birthday cake, as from a piece of cheese, every vestige of blue icing.

And as I turned away I saw in the corner the waiting figure of Anthea Barlow, both hands slightly upraised in front of her body—for all the world as if she was about to clap them and bring him running.

4

I suppose I went to that house again three or four times, perhaps even five or six, before I finally grasped about him a conclusion I ought to have reached not less than twenty years before. It was not until a burning, breathless evening in August—there had been no drop of rain since June and now in the farm-yard the dregs of the never handsome duck-pond had dried to a black-green crust that sprouted a crop of skeleton elder-boughs and rusted tins—that I realised how abysmally, intolerably lonely he was. I had really been very obtuse; even the little pigs should have made it clear to me.

When I arrived that evening he was standing, shirt-sleeved, against the door-post of the barn, gazing out across the yard. At the sound of my footsteps across the sun-baked track that led in from the road he jerked his body off the post and abruptly started forward—eager, as I thought, to greet me.

As soon as he saw who it was, however, he relaxed—no, relaxed is altogether too mild and indefinite a word. He flopped—exactly as if winded, punctured or worn out by heat or something—against the open door.

"Thought for a minute it was Miss Barlow," he said. I fastened on the formal prefix to Anthea Barlow's name with a glance of

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inquiry at him that gave me nothing at all in answer. He was simply staring at the road. "Her bus only gets as far as the station. She has to walk up the hill."

Suddenly in that airless blistering evening I found myself facing the stifling prospect of Valerie Templeton's quintet, sawing its way through an August heat-wave. I half-heard, I thought, a warning echo of screaming strings on the breathless air and said quickly, a second later :

"I didn't really mean to stay. I just dropped in for a minute. If there's a rehearsal I'll just say 'Hullo' to Valerie and then——"

"Oh ! there's no practice," he said. "Valerie's taken the car down to the sea. She's rented a bungalow there. She'll be gone a night or two——"

His face became a mask, offering me no help at all. Behind and beyond him the face of the land, its light soil burnt out by weeks of sun, had become a mask too, with hardly a trace of the green that had graced it in early spring, at the time of apple bloom. A kind of brown crust, in reality the shrivelled leaves of long unwatered trees, had spread about the branches of the orchard. On the house the pear-tree was a mere trellis of blistered timber. Even elderberries were withering and falling, like shrivelled pepper-corns, from their branches above the dried-up pond. Over the western crest of the hill the sun was dropping into a shimmering sky of smoky-purple haze, burning like a deep flame above an altar.

"God, it's hot," he said. A glaze had spread across his eyes. "I'll get you a drink——"

"No, no," I said. "Don't bother——"

Almost before I had finished speaking he threw out an extraordinary remark.

"Reminds me of once when we were boxing," he said. "We started in September that year—the club opened about the third week—and all of a sudden we had a heat-wave."

Not once, all that summer, had he ever mentioned the painful, long-buried episode of our boxing.

"Can't say I remember that," I began to say.

"Oh ! I do, I do," he said. "Perfectly. You were pretty accurate that night. I just couldn't get the measure of you——"

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Here I found myself thirsting to ask him something that had perplexed me for a long long time.

" You never hit me back enough," I said. " You never covered up. If you'd covered up more you could have hit me more."

" That where I went wrong ? "

" Mostly," I said. " You didn't hit me back enough, man. Why on earth didn't you ? "

Gropingly the brown eyes searched the road beyond me.

" I suppose because I rather liked you."

It was a remark that I found so astonishing that I could give it no answer at all. In the following silence he became jumpy again, eyes again searching the road, and he finally looked at his watch.

" Anthea must have missed her bus," he said in a dry voice. " I think I'll walk down to meet her. Will you wait ? The house is open. Help yourself to a drink—everything's on the sideboard."

He started to duck-paddle across the yard and then stopped so suddenly that he actually raised a skid of dust with his feet as he turned.

" I suppose you know all about us ? " he said. " I mean, Miss Barlow and me ? I suppose everybody knows ? "

I did not know ; I was happily free of any tongues that must have been whispering among the orchards.

" I thought everybody probably knew—you know, with Valerie going away and all that. She's got this bungalow by the sea. Shares it with Sandy. You remember Sandy ? It's all—"

Every trace of that protective supercilious glaze I had noted on that first sharp spring evening in the train, together with its puffed air of confidence, had left him now.

" You'll wait, won't you ? " he said. " Do wait. Don't go till I come back. Help yourself to a drink. Hang on, old man, won't you ? "

With such jittery affectionate terms he crossed the yard, half-running, and went down the hill beyond.

When he had gone at last I went into the house and poured myself a long drink from the sideboard on which Valerie Templeton had extinguished some of the burning candles of her years and where Arthur had so carefully pared away the unwanted rind of the birthday cake's harsh blue icing.

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Even then it still didn't occur to me how deeply, how intolerably lonely he was.

"He's just a stupid coward," I kept telling myself. "That's all. A plain stupid coward. That's why he didn't hit me. That's why—"

"Anybody at home?"

My thoughts on cowardice, themselves more than stupid, were suddenly brought to an end by the voice of Anthea Barlow, calling through the open front door of the house from the farm-yard.

"Oh! it's you," she said when I went to the door, "isn't Arthur—?"

"He went down the road to meet you" I said, "only five minutes ago."

"I got off the bus at the other stop," she said, "and walked up by the foot-path. It was cooler that way—well, anyway not quite so hot."

In the heat of the evening she looked flushed and exhausted. She received with a panting smile my suggestion that I should get her a drink and then, as I poured it out at the baronial sideboard, made one of her own.

"Let's sit outside," she said. "I can't bear this room. I hate that awful sideboard."

On what ought to have been a lawn but that was now a rucked brown mattress of untrimmed grass scorched yellow-brown by summer we sat in discoloured canvas deck-chairs, sipping drinks and gazing through the hot evening to the orchard beyond.

This was the orchard where, as I had once so fondly imagined, those great experiments of Arthur Templeton's would find their genesis and their final fruit, and perhaps she read my thoughts as we sat staring at the summer-blistered boughs, under the farthest of which I could just make out the growing litter of pigs and their sow, rooting dustily.

"Arthur's going to do a lot of new grafting in the orchard next winter," she said.

"Oh?"

"You know the way I mean?" she said. "You cut down the old branches and graft on different varieties."

"Yes."

"You know he's got this wonderful idea of a new kind of apple?" she said. "Don't you?"

There is some virtue in lying on certain occasions and I felt that this was one of them.

"No," I said.

"It's this marvellous idea of an entirely different kind of fruit," she said, "a cross between an apple and a pear. He's been working on it for years. There's a professor in—" She went on with Arthur's story, in Arthur's words, and I listened, musing and dazed. The sow and her litter had been turned into the orchard, I now realised, in order to scavenge on the little prematurely ripened fruit that drought had brought down from the boughs, and they wandered gruntingly under the trees, picking up a yellow scrap or two here and there.

"Of course it'll take years," she said. "There's a tremendous lot of work—research and all that—to be done. But wouldn't it be marvellous?"

"Yes."

"I can't help thinking of the first time you would offer a fruit like that to someone," she said. "'Have an apple,' you'd say, and then you'd wait to see the look on their faces."

"What look?"

"Oh! you know, the look of—the surprise. The apple wouldn't have the taste they thought it would. You'd really catch them, wouldn't you?"

I was saved from any answer to this by the sudden voice of Arthur Templeton, whistling from the yard. It was a peculiar whistle, low, bird-like, on three abbreviated notes, and suddenly I realised it was his secret, personal call.

"That's Arthur," she said. "That's his whistle now."

She jumped up from the deck-chair and started running round the side of the house to the farm-yard beyond. I ought to have stayed where I was, but curiosity impelled me, with my drink still in my hand, to the edge of the lawn, where a gap in a trellis-work of withered rambler roses gave me a view of the dusty square of yard.

It was then that I witnessed, at last, the exposure of his loneliness.

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The girl was standing with her back to me and she looked, I thought, for all the world as I remembered Valerie Templeton looking, fair, plump and soft, more than twenty years before. And suddenly I realised that he was not really seeing the girl who stood before him.

"Because I rather liked you," I could hear him saying again. "I suppose because I rather liked you."

A moment later I went to replace my empty glass on the baronial sideboard that Anthea Barlow hated so much. And soon I came out of the house to find her talking to Arthur at the gate of the orchard—and, to my surprise, arguing with him slightly.

"I'll say good-bye," I said.

"Oh ! before you go," she said, "you can settle something. Arthur and I are going for a walk. Arthur says it'll be much hotter *that way*—up the hill—and I say it'll be much hotter *that way*—down the hill. What do you think ?"

"Oh ! I didn't really say that," he started to say. "I wanted to go which way was best, that's all. Whichever way you want."

His voice was like a broken echo. His jaw was smoothly held out, unprotected, ever-inviting.

"There's probably more breeze on the hill," I managed to say.

"Well, of course," she said. "Come on, you silly man." She turned to me with a look of triumph that was neither warm nor radiant. "Isn't that just like him ?" she said and it might have been the voice of Valerie Templeton.

I watched them walk up the slope of the hill, between the apple trees. With intensely focused light the sun was burning every moment with deeper, fiercer orange beyond the scrubby blackened apple boughs, under which the pigs were still rootling. At the crest of the slope Arthur Templeton and the girl stopped for a moment and she stooped and picked up a yellow apple and held it in her hands : an apple that might well, I thought, have been a pear.

A second later she threw it away. It needed only a call from her to set him running after it, like a dog running for a ball or like one of the pigs searching for the dropped fruits of summer ; but it never came.

They disappeared at last into the sun. Above where it blazed there was not a single sacrificial fleece of cloud and there was not a

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breath of air to break the evening silence of all the miles of orchards about the valley until, some moments later, I heard a sound.

It was the sound of Anthea Barlow laughing. But what she was laughing at—whether it was Arthur Templeton or the little pigs or the apple that would taste like a pear or simply at some other prospect of the orchards of the future—it was quite impossible to say.

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Zeybékiko

BY PETER MAYNE

RENTS are lower underground, and the cellar could be in almost any little side-street off Omonia Square at the wrong end of Athens—or even off Kolonaki Square at the elegant right end of Athens, for that matter. But from outside in the street, standing at the top of the stone steps that lead down to the cellar, very little of it would be visible—only the legs of men sitting round tables. It is an eating-place primarily : a ‘taverna’ as they call it in Greece, though not a taverna in the now-fashionable sense of the term, all spruced up and done over, where visitors from abroad might go for an evening of ‘local colour.’ This one, and dozens of others like it, is where people try to feed for seven or eight drachmas,¹ keeping something in hand for more wine. It would be bean soup, probably, with plenty of garlic and olive oil in the making of it, or else stewed octopus, also some bread, of course. Perhaps there would be a slice of a sheep’s-milk cheese for which Mount Parnassus is famous—Feta. Or cabbage salad. The wine is retsina, the resinated wine of the people. Barrels of it on racks line one side of the cellar. There is a thing in the corner of the room like a collapsed summer-house with a kitchen stove visible through the glass panes, also an array of big saucepans of food. A conical chimney over all this takes some of the fumes away. The lighting is the cruel and brilliant white of neon tubes, the floor is cracked concrete, there is a pick-up and radio, the latter dressed in a little frilly cretonne cover with flaps to conceal the tuning-knobs, though it is difficult to decide why. The tables are apt to have covers of American cloth patterned with roses and the men’s feet under them are heavy and down at heel. But it is not boots or American-cloth roses that cause the stranger to stop dead

¹ About one and tenpence.

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in his tracks and stare down into the cellar : it is the rippling, metallic, enveloping, quicksilver music of the *bouzouki*, flowing over everything and up the stone steps and out into the street to drag men in by the ears. It was so strange to mine when first I heard it that I had to listen a great deal before I succumbed and could begin to distinguish the rhythms.

The *bouzouki* is a sort of mandolin with either three or four double strings. Its body is like a big half-gourd, much patterned with an inlay of coloured woods. The neck is long and slender. It used to be strung with gut in earlier days but it is strung with wire now, and it seems to me that wire must suit the character of the music best. For those who like to know such things, the neck is fretted with the divisions of the Pythagorean 'Kanōn,' it is usually tuned Do-Fa-Sol-Do and ideally it is played with an eagle-quill plectrum. Fewer people play the *bouzouki* themselves these days, however, for the double reason that it is so difficult to play well and that since the war it has become so easy to get gramophone recordings by the experts. These records are tremendously popular. Movie-houses buy them for their entr'actes, the Radio buys them for their programme fill-ins, the little steamers that ply between mainland Greece and the islands buy them and put them through the 'intercom' to keep their passengers happy. And of course taverna-keepers buy them and play them on the pick-up plugged into the radio-set so that their customers can sing and dance as well as eat. Canned *bouzouki* has this advantage over live *bouzouki*, that its sound can be magnified to many times its true volume simply by twiddling a knob. The air becomes impregnated with it. They like it that way in the tavernas. Noise is friendly. Greeks are noisy.

Down in the cellar there is a man dancing alone. A small space has been left clear for this in the middle of the room. He has shabby clothes and a cigarette hanging out of his mouth and he seems to be one of the customers. There is nothing street-corner or *apache* about him, however. Most cities leave a mark on their citizens, and an *apache* is indelibly marked with Paris, just as Teddy-boys are marked with London. Athens is a city all right, but somehow it does not seem to be one, and it leaves no mark on its citizens, at least not below the level of the bourgeoisie. The poor people living in it remain

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villagers in all the essentials, country-people with their roots still firmly in the antique soil of Greece, not in the paving-blocks of these little back-streets. This particular man dancing is marked by the countryside in this way, despite his shabby town clothes. He is surrounded by the backs of men eating at their tables as he revolves so slowly, his arms outstretched, his hands hanging relaxed. A voice has joined the *bouzouki* and some of the men eating join in too—they all know all the words :

‘ As much, as much as man can love his mother . . . ’

—the man dancing clicks his fingers to the rhythm as he turns in his anti-clockwise circles, his shoulders rounded, his feet sometimes stamping at the earth. He raises one foot, kicks, and turns on the other, then a slow pirouette. He stamps once more, he sinks down on to one knee and with a curious lateral swinging movement shifts his weight from this knee to the other and then rises up again, and all the time his head remains bowed, his eyes fixed on the earth, and his lips smile in a withdrawn, enwrapped sort of way . . .

‘ So much, so much has been my love for you . . . ’

It is a song of unrequited love. The singer’s sharp voice goes on and on, flexible as wire, crossing and recrossing the melodic line and then back again to it in a manner that is at first bewildering, but accurate and hard, with no tremolo. The man dancing smiles his private smile and perhaps by now anyone from the western world who had dropped in out of curiosity to watch would feel that he had already seen enough, quite enough, and he might be smiling privately too as he clambered up the steps into the street again, thinking of the drunk man dancing—if it could be called dancing. Drink could be part of the truth, certainly : it goes very well with the *bouzouki* : but to suppose the truth to be no more than that would be to have missed the greater part of it. This is not just a lumbering half-t tipsy peasant dancing by himself in a cellar. It might be worth while to take another look because it is doubtful if anyone seeing it for the first time could guess what it meant. The Greeks themselves have relearnt it only recently—for this is *Zeybékiko*, and it has come

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home again to twentieth-century Greece in a strange way, as a by-product of disaster.

In 1922 Greece suffered a terrible defeat in Asia Minor. Smyrna, with its large Greek population and for a time a Greek city wrested from the Turks, was retaken by the Turks, sacked and razed to the ground. Thousands of Greeks were massacred and those who escaped fled to Greece as refugees, the great majority to Athens, where makeshift arrangements were hastily made to receive them. Conditions were appalling in those first days, however, because there was neither the money nor the organization necessary to deal with a problem so vast and sudden. The refugees had been obliged to leave behind them nearly everything they possessed in the world and were in great misery. They were exhausted too, both physically and morally. But amongst the salvage of their wrecked lives was their passion for the *bouzouki* and for the dance *Zeybékiko*. It might indeed have been invented for just such circumstances as these, where each man was thrown back on his own wretched resources and must stand alone. So while the Greek refugees danced, the Greek people of the mainland watched and listened, and from the first moment it must have seemed to belong to them. The Greek temperament reacted to it immediately—in particular the ‘rebel’ in all Greeks, though ‘rebel’ must here be understood in a special sense. The word is *rebetes*—meaning unruly, undisciplined. It does not signify ‘rebellion’ in the political sense, but the revolt of the individual against the herd, of one man against all other men, against bourgeois convention. In *Zeybékiko* a man could dance as he pleased, alone, bending the basic steps to his own purposes and submitting only to the compulsive 9/8 rhythm. He did not need to know the ‘why’ of it, he had only to listen and respond in his own way. The stoic, noble qualities of Greece, the resignation and complete acceptance of life and death, the passionate individualism, each man’s knowledge of his own personal superiority over all other men—these all seemed present in the rhythm and the dance. It was like the celebration of a Triumph, an act of liberation—not of mankind but of Man, of Self. It spread like fire through peasant Greece.

This was *Zeybékiko*—older than Byzantium to whose music it bears so close a technical resemblance, older even than Christendom. It

Zeybékiko

had been known in Thrace far away in the north of Greece, in mythical times. Orpheus, who enslaved the world with the music of his lyre and was to be worshipped as a god after his death, is said to have used the same rhythm. Later, though still two thousand years ago and more, it was to be heard in what was then Phrygia—whose capital city, Gordion, lies in ruins in present-day Turkey. *Zeybékiko* survived the centuries, it saw Byzantium fall when the Ottoman Turks took Constantinople, it stayed on in the name of the tribe called Zeybek, whom some believe to be the descendants of the original Thracian Greek settlers of Phrygia. The Zeybek tribe was 'rebel' in the Greek sense: neither Christian nor Muslim, uncompromising individualists. Their main source of revenue was contraband. They wore fantastic clothes to affront the conventions and to emphasise their own separateness. They were the dandies of Asia Minor and they danced *Zeybékiko*.

Despite the astonishing popularity that *Zeybékiko* has achieved in Greece since 1922, it was not for very many years after that date that the average educated man became aware of its existence. The explanation is presumably that it was danced in the obscurity of little taverns, in villages, on the waterfront of Piraeus, the Port of Athens, in the back-streets of Athens itself: and even if men from outside *Zeybékiko* had happened to stumble upon the dancing, would that in itself have opened anyone's eyes to the strange phenomenon it represented? Anthropologists and others had done work on the subject, of course—for example the late Professor Ernst Pfuhl of Basle University, and in Greece today Lieutenant-Colonel Thanos Veloudios has made it a special study for thirty years and more—but did anyone listen to them? It was perhaps the German occupation of Greece in the Second World War that most effectively brought *Zeybékiko* to the attention of the educated classes, because its essentially Greek character marked it out as one of the symbols of resistance, so that when the war was over it had become more popular than ever. Café society in Athens took it up and the tavernas where it was believed to be best seen were besieged for a while by a new sort of clientèle. But the fashion did not last, and after a time *Zeybékiko* had ceased to be a subject for conversation.

And that, of course, is the point. *Zeybékiko* is not a subject for

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conversation but for direct experience, and we who have emerged from the mould of a formal education are cut off by our sophistication from any direct experience of what it means. We can learn the Tango, if we want to, but not *Zeybékiko*. It is not a ball-room dance, nor even a folk-dance. In fact it is not a dance at all, but a rite. The word itself is probably Phrygian, a compound of the god *ZEUS* (*ZEY*) and the word for *BREAD* (*BEKOS*). It is taken to symbolise in this way a sought-for union of the spirit with the body, the godhead with man. It was danced in high antiquity in honour of Cybele, the mother-goddess—and the same 9/8 rhythm has remained with unbroken continuity in Thrace in some of the quasi-religious dances of the Anastenarides, the Firewalkers. Cosmic qualities are claimed for this rhythm : it is said that the changing seasons, the passage of Time and the constant renewal of life are all inherent in it. I have been told that the dancer seeks to project himself into the interval between Time and Space. I have also been told that it is an act of worship, the worship of Self—and this I could comprehend more easily than the rest. We who are outside *Zeybékiko* are not for that reason obliged to believe blindly, but if we have the chance to watch it danced, with attention and over a period of months (as I have recently), we will perhaps finally accept the evidence of our own eyes—that it brings a strange liberation of the spirit to simple men, and that this is the reason for dancing it. The ancient rite has been put to a modern secular purpose.

Nobody in the taverna much troubles to watch and the man dancing is quite unconcerned with an audience anyhow. He is dancing for himself, exorcising his own ghosts, finding his own liberation. It does not matter if he dances badly, because he is to be judged by his own standards and by himself alone. There is something both tragic and noble about the slowly-turning figure, so completely separated from us. If he danced so well that we could watch for the aesthetic pleasure he gave us, he would be aware of it and it would have become something else—a performance. This happens often enough and is instantly recognisable : the dancer ‘performs,’ sometimes very well, but it is self-conscious and no longer the true *Zeybékiko*. As it is, the man turns slowly in his circles, working his shoulder-blades under his skin as if he moved his wings, and his arms hang lightly on the

Zeybékiko

air like wings too. He bends constantly to touch the earth from which he came, knowing that his strength still comes from it. Then he stamps with his feet, as if about to take flight into the *bouzouki* music that flutters about his head, he does a double kick and with his open palm strikes the inside of the left foot as it follows the right to earth again, he executes a little ragged spin. He has no need of words, though the singer is still singing . . .

'For what I had or had not you have swallowed
I've nothing left and so you now forsake me . . .'

—and then something commonplace about not minding because one day you will regret it and be beating your head in remorse. And then a final couplet that suddenly seems filled with the true meaning of the dance . . .

'For there is no heart on earth the equal of mine !
Where there is Giorgos, there is gold !'

The record has come to an end, and the dance too, and Giorgos, Golden Giorgos in his old shabby suit and big boots, goes back to join his companions. His eyes still smile inwardly. He knows nothing about the interval between Time and Space, and yet perhaps everything. Someone has spiked a bit of something on a fork—octopus ?—and is holding it out to him as he sits down. He accepts it and munches without comment. He has celebrated his Triumph—a triumph to take the place of the failures and miseries that have now slipped quietly from his shoulders and left him at peace. Where there is Giorgos—or Costa, or Iannis, or Dino, or Dimitri—there is gold. He is ready to drink some more retsina. Someone else will be dancing in a moment.

N.W. 5 & N. 6

BY JOHN BETJEMAN

Red cliffs arise. And up them service lifts
Soar with the groceries to silver heights.
Lissenden Mansions. And my memory sifts
Lilies from lily-like electric lights
And Irish stew smells from the smell of prams
And roar of seas from roar of London trams.

Out of it all my memory carves the quiet
Of that dark privet hedge where pleasures breed,
There first, intent upon its leafy diet,
I watched the looping caterpillar feed
And saw it hanging in a gummy froth
Till, weeks on, from the chrysalis burst the moth.

I see black oak twigs outlined on the sky,
Red squirrels on the Burdett-Coutts estate.
I ask my nurse the question 'Will I die ?'
As bells from sad St. Anne's ring out so late,
'And if I do die, will I go to Heaven ?'
Highgate at eventide. Nineteen-eleven.

'You will. I won't.' From that cheap nursery-maid,
Sadist and puritan as now I see,
I first learned what it was to be afraid,
Forcibly fed when sprawled across her knee
Lock'd into cupboards, left alone all day,
'World without end.' What fearsome words to pray.

N.W. 5 & N. 6

'World without end.' It was not what she'd do
That frightened me so much as did her fear
And guilt at endlessness. I caught them too,
Hating to think of sphere succeeding sphere
Into eternity and God's dread will
I caught her terror then. I have it still.

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The Williamsburg Pattern

BY ELISABETH KYLE

DURING the dinner-party, I surreptitiously examined my host's wallpaper. It was stamped with a series of little pictures, each repeating the same coach and horses, the same panniered, powdered woman and the same gallant handing her in, while a replica of the same Wren building acted as background right round the room.

"It's called the Williamsburg pattern," my hostess had followed my eyes. Then she added kindly, "Everything to do with Williamsburg is in vogue just now."

And then all the other guests at this American dinner-party began telling me how I really ought to visit Williamsburg seeing I was only in the next State anyway. All except the man on my left who remained somewhat silent and thoughtful. The others reminded me how Williamsburg had been the Colonial Capital of Virginia, founded in 1633. How its famous College of William and Mary had been granted a Royal Charter three years later. How, of course, the original town with its Governor's Palace, State Capitol, and most of its old houses had been swept away by the passage of time. And what everyone went to see, nowadays, was the amazing Restoration, whereby a vanished town had been raised again from its ashes, to serve as a living picture of America's past.

"It must have cost a lot of money," I said.

"It cost John D. Rockefeller, Junior, over thirty-five million dollars to date," said my host, "and it will cost nearly double that by the time it is finished. All this is his own personal gift, too. Nothing to do with the Rockefeller Foundation. He just got sold on the idea of saving what was left of old Williamsburg and reconstructing the rest."

The wallpaper suddenly seemed to come nearer and hit me in the

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eye. In the burst of conversation which followed, my silent neighbour on the left leaned forward and said quietly, " You come from Britain. Don't go near the place. You have the real thing there, so why bother ? "

But I kept thinking about Williamsburg just the same, although my angle of interest was not, perhaps, quite what it should have been. How had the proud, aristocratic Williamsburgers taken this sudden influx of wealth ? Who actually inhabited this museum town, and what was it like to live in one ? Then, too, I was interested in the organisation which must have gone to so wholesale a revival. I learned that the restored area of Williamsburg extended to 220 acres. That 82 eighteenth-century buildings had been rescued from decrepitude and restored to their original appearance, while no fewer than 375 public buildings, taverns, houses and shops had been entirely rebuilt on their original foundations, this necessitating the destruction of 616 later buildings which had grown up on the old sites.

I learned that the restorations were not only accurate in outward appearance, but that care had been used to reconstruct the old buildings according to eighteenth-century methods, and, where possible, of eighteenth-century materials. (One slightly ribald informant told me that the famous Williamsburg elms had actually had their tops cut to the height they had attained at the time of the Capital's most glorious epoch, but I discounted this.)

When an old house needed bracing with new brick and timber work, the decayed fragments were examined by experts, after removal, to see how, and with what materials, the house had been put together in the first place. Victorian porches and excrescences were ruthlessly removed. Each step of the reconstruction was photographed and, in some cases, even filmed to form a record of the face-lifting process. Archaeologists sifted over 125 tons of artifacts from soil all over the area. And an army of architects and research workers had dug through every sort of data belonging to the period, over in Europe as well as in Colonial America itself.

When it came to buildings of which all trace had vanished, the chief guides in reconstruction were the Frenchman's Map and the Bodleian Plate. The first was the work of an engineering officer of Rochambeau's forces during the seige of nearby Yorktown. It

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plotted the position of every building in Colonial Williamsburg. The second, a copper engraving found in the Bodleian, showed the official buildings of the town in detail.

It was only February when I went there. The tourist season had hardly begun, though the air was already milk-warm, and the vast forests of southern pine stretching between Richmond and Williamsburg were flushed already with delicate green. There, in a green saucer between the pines, lay the wallpaper city. No birds flew over it yet, which accentuated its curiously lifeless air. The buildings, old or new, all looked new. But why should one cavil at that, when the aim had been to restore Williamsburg's appearance to the days when it *was* new?

I sat down on a seat on Palace Green and looked about me. There were plenty of cars in Williamsburg, but they were not in evidence here. Huge parking spaces were provided on the fringe of the old town, just as there were huge, businesslike offices which dealt with the various problems of Williamsburg, Inc. But the latter were camouflaged behind eighteenth-century frontages back nearer the college end of the town; and as for the former, most people parked their cars on arrival, since they were not allowed to leave them at the entrances to the show places.

An ornate open carriage and pair stood at the other end of the Green. The negro coachman, in full livery, dozed on the box. Presently he would be hired to drive strangers on an Old World tour of the town, but there were few strangers here as yet. All around the Green stood brick or clapboard houses sparkling with new paint. I found it impossible to tell which might be old, and which reconstructed. But all their gardens were bordered with box hedges that grew like sprawling bushes several feet high. They filled the air with a distinctive, slightly musty odour—the odour of long shut-up drawers newly opened. The odour of Williamsburg itself.

The anachronistic sound of a car engine made me turn my head. It was the little green single-decker bus making its slow round of the official 'sights.' It started every quarter of an hour or so, from the big parking space beside the Information Centre, and stopped at the Capitol, the Raleigh Tavern, the Court House, then round by the Green and back along the length of Duke of Gloucester Street.

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You stepped in where you would, and you bought no ticket. This was Mr. John D. Rockefeller's personal gift to you.

So I stepped in. We rolled slowly up Duke of Gloucester Street, where every second house was a shop and hung out its sign. At the Silversmith's, a boy in a leather apron showed you fine specimens of Georgian silver, or sold you almost equally fine reproductions. At the Bonnet Maker's, a lady in appropriate dress smiled gracefully behind a counter laden with authentic bonnets and hats of the period. At the Print Shop, the owner, an obvious connoisseur, had for sale a larger and choicer selection of old prints and mezzotints—mostly brought back from London or Paris—than I have seen in any shop at home.

And it was there that (encouraged by the finding of Willie Nicholson's cartoon of Queen Victoria as an old woman in her carriage—a print seldom to be found at home) I confessed what I was really looking for. I wanted to find traces of the Williamsburg still within living memory, whose householders had entertained one another frugally in houses which still remained unpainted for lack of money; houses still blemished by Victorian conservatories and pillared porches. Houses one could believe in because they were so far from perfect. . . .

The Print Seller smiled. Hardly anybody lived in such a house nowadays, he said. There was no need to. Williamsburg, Inc. had been formed in the nick of time to save the old families from want. It bought their houses, giving them a generous price right away, but permitting them, and in some cases, even their children, to go on living there. It carried out all repairs and decorations free of cost. Nor did it dictate too severely about colours and styles of interior decoration.

"They can do what they like with the outside of our town," an indignant old Williamsburger said to me, "but I'm hanged if they'll dictate what I'm to put in my sitting-room!"

It was he and the Print Seller, between them, who managed to reconstruct another, later Williamsburg from memory, for my delectation. To them it was only yesterday since Palace Green had still been the camping ground for circuses, travelling medicine shows and shabby little theatres. Both remembered quite clearly that

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exciting day of April 1919, when the circus lion escaped and rushed into the house of Miss Dora Smith, who lived on the Green. They remembered how Miss Dora's old negro servant had been knocked flat by it when crossing the hall. And how, after the lion's capture, Miss Dora had taken a pot of paint out on to the porch and had carefully outlined its giant paw-marks, in everlasting memorial of the occasion. . . .

But the porch had been taken down long ago. So had that sagging frame-house just off Duke of Gloucester Street, in which the astonishing old Mrs. Davis had lived. The house, though old, had not been ancient enough to make it worth while preserving. But Mrs. Davis and her strange claim are still remembered by the real Williamsburgers, even if outsiders laugh and historians refuse to give any credence to the claim.

Mrs. Davis insisted that she was a great-granddaughter of George the Third's sister, Caroline Matilda, the ill-fated Queen of Denmark. Instead of dying in 1775, Mrs. Davis said that the unlucky prisoner-Queen had been smuggled out in a coffin specially pierced with air holes, and had sailed to America, there marrying and having descendants. Mrs. Davis herself had a high and arrogant temper, and also a piece of gold lace, both of which she claimed to have come to her from the Guelphs. Poverty-stricken, she accepted alms and gifts of food openly, as tribute to her royal blood. But I liked best her dying remark. A sanctimonious neighbour having asked if all was well between her and her Maker, Mrs. Davis replied coldly that she had made it a rule through life never to gratify idle curiosity.

Nowadays, people like Mrs. Davis would not have to worry about where their next meal came from. There seem to be little jobs for everyone, and nobody is too aristocratic to turn them down. Farther up Duke of Gloucester Street, in an immaculate small house, lives the elderly lady who is responsible for all the flower decorations in the empty, furnished houses and State buildings open to the public. She is an acknowledged authority upon it.

She goes out into the countryside and culls the golden-brown ferns, the stiff, unnatural looking flowers which do sometimes obtrude themselves in nature, and spreads them out, with shiny nuts and silver lichen, into fans and pyramids to adorn the sculptured mantelshelves

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throughout the town. It is she who arranges those cornucopias of waxy fruit, those purple clusters of grapes that mirror themselves in the magnificent, polished surface of the Governor's dining-table. Every morning I would come upon her making her rounds on foot to examine her 'arrangements' and replace them when necessary.

Then there are Hosts and Hostesses—thirty-two Regulars, sixteen Regular-Casuals, and sixteen Casuals. In other words there is a full-time staff of Virginian ladies and gentlemen willing, in return for a salary, to robe themselves cumbrously if beautifully, and play at inhabiting the ghost houses with their ghostly furniture for so many hours each day. The Casuals and Regular-Casuals are their supporting cast. They are the citizens who can only play the game part-time, or who are merely willing to step in on occasion, for an appropriate fee. At the lunch hour, or when shopping on their way home, one comes across them, walking with delicate care to avoid any injury to their expensive wardrobes. At the big super-market on the outskirts of the town panniers can be seen being tilted edgeways to get their wearers through the barrier, and lace flounces falling back from rounded arms as a Hostess reaches for something wanted off one of the shelves. . . .

The visitors see them thus. Either hurrying gracefully across some picturesque and flowery corner of the town to report on duty, or engaged in incongruous snatches of ordinary living. They can examine them close at hand each time they step into the airless perfection of the show houses of Williamsburg. Somewhere about the house, either in the wainscoted hall, or perhaps quietly by an open window upstairs, sits a waxwork woman dressed to elaborate perfection in the colours which best suit her type. On a visitor's arrival, however, the picture moves, becomes animated, reaches out a courteous hand for the entry ticket, and offers, if desired, to take the modern intruder round. She is primed to answer every question likely to be asked. Tactfully to restrain the fabric-feeler and the ornament-lifter. And all (for she is a Southern lady) with the most charming manners in the world.

Behind this carefully posed picture, as behind everything in Williamsburg, there lies a brisk, efficient modern organisation. It boasts an office and an office staff all to itself. The staff consists of Super-

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intendent, two Assistant Superintendents, a Secretary and three Training Hostesses. The preliminary training consists of 85 hours. If the would-be Hostess shows aptitude and intelligence, she goes on to the regular training of 104 hours; and always, after a certain length of service, she must take a refresher course. The same no doubt goes for the Virginian gentlemen who are carefully coached in the local colour they must provide at the Raleigh Tavern or the Coffee Houses of the period.

A Hostess must learn the historical background of the town and the time, so that no Middle-Western school-teacher can faze her. She must glean a general knowledge of the furniture, fabrics, wall-coverings and ornaments of the period, so that the tourist eager to do over her home 'Williamsburg style' directly she gets back to it, can have her eager questions answered. And she must also know a little about the principles of Colonial architecture and the problems of Restoration. Finally, she receives coaching in the psychology of human nature. She sees plenty of it.

To dress her alone takes another fully paid staff and organisation. This Department is housed in an unobtrusive building, one of the many behind the tourist façade of the town, where the strings of Williamsburg are pulled. I marvelled at the magnificent collection of authentic garments brought from all over Europe as well as America, and which filled an entire room. They were not for wearing. They were kept here as models to be copied either in style, in fabric or in both.

The Head Designer, a Russian woman of taste, also designs her own models. She has a genius for colour blending and will go to any lengths to find genuine untarnishable silver braid or the right sort of buckle. If she has no more to go upon than a faded length of flowered cotton, or an old pattern from a scrap-bag, she will get the design reproduced in sufficient quantity to make a charming overdress for some Hostess to wear in the torrid heat of Williamsburg's summer.

I visited the sewing-room, where women sat before capacious tables, flooded with light from the array of windows behind them. They seemed to delight in their work. One woman lovingly stroked the length of Italian velvet before her when I stopped to admire it.

I took supper that night in the dolls' house belonging to one of

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the Hostesses. It was really a modern building, hardly larger than a summer-house, set down in a corner of somebody's old-world garden. Its owner had been left a widow with very small means, and the job was a godsend to her. She fitted it like a glove. She had charm, a Southern accent, and a real appreciation and knowledge of old things.

After supper, she took me in to her bedroom and showed me her wardrobe for the season. She was dark, so reds and crimsons suited her best. Across the foot of the bed, where she had just discarded it in order to put on something simpler in which to cook the meal, lay her working dress. Since, by Virginian standards, the warm weather had not yet arrived, it was of fine wool, mulberry coloured, with a shell-pink kerchief ready to fill in the square-cut yoke. Beside it was thrown down a warm cloak of holly green with silver clasps.

"My everyday dress." She fingered it lightly, adding, "They give me two flowered prints for summah. New ones each year of course. But wait till ah show you my silk one—for concerts and functions in the old Palace!"

She opened a wardrobe built in the wall. Out billowed the delicate white and silver brocade as soon as she unzipped its modern cellophane container. The little silver shoes with their Louis heels reposed on a shelf above. "We have to be very, *very* careful with our best dresses, they're so expensive!"

Williamsburg Hostesses are not in the least self-conscious about their attire. But they know they are dressing up, and they appear to love it. Only the negroes struck me as being completely at home and forgetful of the livery they have to wear as they go about their tasks of tidying up the show parts of the town. I would stand and watch them as quietly they rolled the lawn behind the Paradise House, or clipped the great box hedges, wearing sky-blue breeches, scarlet waistcoats and plain black tricornes cocked over their curls. They alone seemed to have belonged to the landscape without a break.

Naturally, antique shops abounded. The more attractive ones were in what looked like private houses, curtained, hedged, with only a modest sign at the gate to indicate that one might walk in. Their contents had to be choice and genuine before they were put on sale at all. And they all had to be of the same period—Williamsburg's

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period. Their owners made yearly trips to Europe and had apparently creamed off the market, for I have never seen so many choice pieces together, without any rubbish, except at our Antique Dealers' Fair.

Williamsburg also deals in impeccable reproductions. I found them, carefully segregated from the genuine pieces, in the Craft House judiciously placed just beside the Information Centre and the famous (and fashionable) Williamsburg Inn. Here were room upon room, floor upon floor of Georgian wine-tables, morocco-covered wing chairs, even four-poster beds, standing, exquisitely arranged, waiting to be bought at prices only a little below the genuine articles. But they were finely made by hand, from properly seasoned woods, and were worthy of their price. The Fabrics Department showed perfect reproductions of the original brocade hangings and glazed chintzes to be seen in the State buildings and old houses on view in the town. The Print Department had on sale fine reproductions of the flower prints to be seen in the Governor's Palace.

I walked back slowly towards the Green. The pale, clear sky above me was pierced by the spire of Bruton Parish Church, and the graves of the old Williamsburgers made green humps about it. They, and it, remained untouched from the old days. Inside the church, one might still see the Prayer Book used during the War of Independence, with a faint, defiant line drawn through the name of His Majesty King George the Third. The Guide outside the Powder Magazine gazed thoughtfully after me, his tricorne hat in his hand. The Union Jack flew lazily from its pole, reminder that this was once a British Colony.

The negro had driven off his coach and horses. But a car nosed slowly round the Green. It was to pick me up here, and take me to see over another bit of Williamsburg's hidden machinery. The young man at the wheel jumped out, greeted me, and we drove off again. He was one of the curators of the town's treasures, and his pleasant job it was to spend some months in Europe every year, buying old furniture.

We drove to a discreet distance out of the town. I found myself approaching what looked like a small factory, well hidden from the tourist beat. It proved to be fireproof, steel encased, and well protected by special locks which my guide negotiated with a bunch of

The Williamsburg Pattern

keys. The existence of this building was, for obvious reasons, not publicised. No map of the town marks its position, and its contents were being shown me as a special favour. Their value ran to many hundreds of thousands of pounds. For here, kept immaculately, at a carefully regulated temperature, were stored all the rich fabrics, the valuable porcelain, silver and glass, the exquisite small pieces of furniture needed to renew and refresh the show buildings of the town.

A room hung with Georgian mirrors sparkled and gleamed. Another, larger one was lined from floor to ceiling with shelves laden with chocolate services in Meissen or Sèvres, bowls and jars of famille rose, Nymphenburg groups of chalk-white figures. The fabrics hung in a great hall, suspended like banners from poles. There were curtains of glazed chintz, brocades from French châteaux, Venetian-cut velvets from old Italian palaces. Satins, stiff with embroidered flowers, hung like folds of dull metal close to the ground. Most of the materials were in good condition; but a few were fragile, faded, worn. They had been brought here to serve as patterns for reproductions. The Department employed skilled workers to mend the fabrics, and it had its own method of cleaning even the frailest of them.

"Look at this!" The young man spread out a richly embroidered curtain heavy with fruit and flowers. "It was filthy when it reached me. It had been wrapped round a Chinese vase I had bought in a little junk shop in England. Just thrown in as packing material. I wired the store that I'd pay anything in reason for another curtain like it. Guess the old fellow must have been delighted, for he wired back he had some fine old curtains if I cared to call back. Well, I drove clear across England to see what he had looked out. He'd collected the most terrible Victorian plush atrocities you can imagine. But no second curtain like this one, alas!"

And then he said something which brought home to me that almost Germanic passion for authenticity which shows itself each time America chooses to have dealings with the past.

"You don't happen to be able to tell me where I could buy a material called Moreen next time I come over to Britain?"

I said rather stupidly, "Do you mean Maroon?"

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"No. It's a material, not a colour. A sort of wool repp with a wavy pattern through it. Middle-class households used it a lot for upholstery and curtains during the eighteenth century. As more of the smaller houses get taken over, we have quite a job to find the right furnishings for them. Not too grand—I say, I wonder whether you might know the stuff under some other name?"

I was led into an office, where dictionaries were consulted by various helpful people. Special dictionaries, dealing with every sort of term in furnishing or architecture. But no. Moreen gave no other clue under its entry than the ones he had given already.

"If you're through here, I can take you over to the Brush-Everard House. They've a chair there, covered with it."

Doors were locked again, and the car started up. By now it was almost evening. The elms stood up darker against the sky. Other keys were being turned in locks. They were shutting up all along Duke of Gloucester Street, and figures in mob caps and capes were already tippling home.

The Brush-Everard House stood by the Green. A Hostess in turquoise taffeta returned up the steps she had just gone down and opened the door of the empty house again. Candle-snuffers stood on their trays, but no one was going to use them to-night. The four-poster beds were made up, with patchwork quilts rather than damask silk coverings, since patchwork belonged to a small house like this. And so did the chair, drawn up by a window now shuttered for the night.

When the shutters were thrown open again I recognised its covering at once. The dark crimson material teased me with recollections of faded hangings—those of my grandmother's four-poster bed.

"I thought you would know the material when you saw it," the young man said, adding rather tactlessly, "you being Scotch. It must have been quite a cheap material and very hard-wearing."

I nodded. "It was. I used to make a tent of it."

"A tent!" he exclaimed in surprise.

I could not explain that I knew just the feel of the material against my finger-nails before stroking it to make sure and remembering how long ago I had discovered a world of my own within a tent of draperies perched high on my grandmother's bed. And when those

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heavy folds hid me inside I had dreamed of the exciting world of adventure without.

"I had no idea it was used for tents and I have been searching for this material for years," said the young man wistfully.

He clasped the shutters again, and we felt our way out of the darkened house to a world I had never dreamed of—Williamsburg.

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The Perfect Freedom

ETIENNE AMYOT

THERE are few railway stations in Europe more bleak, more uninviting, than the Bahnhof Enge in the city of Zurich. It is not, as you might suppose, a bustling, noisy, crowded terminus. It is merely a stopping-off place for the great continental expresses. It is built of a singularly cheerless grey stone. It is open to the four winds. And, by some curious dispensation of providence, you only seem to stand on its platform either at six o'clock in the morning, or at eleven o'clock at night. It is not the sort of place where you would ever expect to run into an old friend. Yet it was there, one morning in December, in the frosty light of dawn, with a howling east wind whistling through me, that I saw Edith Larrimer again. She had occupied the Wagon-Lit next my own. We had travelled together the whole way from Calais without in the least being aware that the other was on the train. With astonished recognition we greeted one another, then waited on the icy platform for the attendant to hand down our luggage.

"I had simply no idea," she exclaimed, "you were on the train."

"Are you staying in Zurich?" I asked.

"No. I have to find my way to the Hauptbahnhof, wherever that may be, to take another train."

"Where to?"

"To the Engadine."

"Are you out here for long?"

"Six weeks. It is the first time in my life I have been abroad. I thought I'd spend Christmas and the New Year up in the mountains."

"What part of the Engadine are you going to?"

"A little village called Engelhaus. It is not very far from St. Moritz."

I knew the Engadine fairly well, but had never heard of Engelhaus.

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It was obviously one of those mountain villages seldom visited by the ordinary tourist. I wondered what had made her decide to spend six whole weeks in a place no-one else ever went to.

The porter wheeled our things out to where the taxis were. As we got into the motor she turned again to me, and, with a rueful little smile, said :

" It is odd, isn't it, how we only seem to meet on railway stations ? "

She was thinking, of course, of the last time we had seen one another. It must have been ten years ago. I had gone down to Hampshire for her mother's funeral. We had met then, and said good-bye, on Winchester station.

In the taxi she told me her train did not leave until the afternoon, and so I suggested that instead of trying to kill time—for she had several hours in which to do nothing—she might care to come with me to my hotel, have a brush-up, stay to an early luncheon, and that I would see her off afterwards. She accepted my suggestion in that cool, detached way which was so much a part of her temperament. I suddenly remembered how, in the past, that casual, almost off-hand manner had always slightly exasperated her friends.

We drove along the lake, and I stole another glance at her. I saw how much she had altered since our last meeting.

Her hair, with the usual wisps sticking out in all directions from under her beret, had gone very grey, and the skin over her high cheekbones had become more taut ; it was now cut into by a thousand fine wrinkles. Her chin, too, was more prominent than before. She no longer sat so bolt upright. She had become, in fact, exactly what she was, a middle-aged woman of fifty. But there was one feature that had not changed. Her eyes were the same ; they still held all their old, challenging, fearless expression.

It was unnecessary for me to ask after her health. In the old days I had always marvelled at her strength. And now this morning, at the station, when the porter had failed to lift that heavy trunk of hers, she herself had seized hold of it, and, with the greatest ease, swung it up on to the barrow. But in spite of the abundant energy she seemed still to possess, I thought she looked mentally worn, as though her mind had not been able to keep pace with her body.

We said very little to one another as we drove along. From time

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to time I saw her steal a quick glance at me. I imagined she was also summing me up, and was no doubt feeling about me very much the same as I felt about her.

At the hotel, whilst she was tidying up, I ordered coffee and *brioches*, and waited for her to come down. I found myself thinking again of those terrible years of confinement which had only terminated with the death of her mother. I wondered what she had done with herself ever since, what sort of a life she had lived these last ten years.

I had always known Edith. The Larrimers were neighbours of ours in Dorset. Old Dr. Larrimer—he was over sixty when Edith was born—was our vicar. As a child I never had much contact with him. But Mrs. Larrimer, a pretty woman, with a delicate oval face, and a most gentle way of speaking, had always been kind to me. Edith was an only child. She and I played together. We were very devoted to one another. As children we spent many happy hours down on the coast at Lulworth. When we were older we went for long, exhausting tramps over the downs near Corfe, leaving home early in the morning and only getting back just in time for dinner. We used to look forward to the school holidays when we knew we should be together again.

Edith had always been the very antithesis of her mother, and, as she grew up, the difference between mother and daughter became even more marked. She had no trace of Mrs. Larrimer's meticulous refinement, none of that flair the other had for making the most of her personal appearance. Edith's hair was always untidy. There was usually a tear somewhere in her dress, and there was always a hole in her stocking. With some asperity, her mother used to refer to her as 'my daughter, the hoyden.' Very probably it was that fastidious disapproval of her daughter's temperament that caused Edith to turn in on herself. For she acquired that aloof, indifferent manner at an extremely early age. She used it, I believe, as a protective covering for the barbed criticism so constantly levelled at her by Mrs. Larrimer.

Edith adored her father. She had no affection whatsoever for her mother. Dr. Larrimer was a fine scholar. He was the author of several rather esoteric books. It was from him that Edith inherited her passion for medieval history. It was her ambition to go up to Cambridge and take a degree, an ambition in which she was greatly

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encouraged by her father. But, when she was seventeen, Dr. Larrimer died suddenly of a stroke, and that safe little world she had always lived in disintegrated overnight. She and her mother left Dorset, and moved up to London. There they lived in a cramped little apartment in Knightsbridge. Later on, when I also came to live in London, I would very often be invited by the pair of them to Sunday luncheon, and I usually stayed on to tea and supper as well. Sometimes we would all go together to a concert in the Albert Hall—Mrs. Larrimer was very fond of Oratorios and English choral singing—and sometimes Edith and I would be allowed to walk in the Park. On those occasions, when she was alone with me, she would drop her reserve, and tell me how she longed for her freedom. She hated being tied to her mother. They had such different points of view. She disliked her mother's conventional friends. She could not abide the sort of life she was expected to conform to. They had very little money, and they kept no servant. Edith found herself more and more occupied with household chores. With her scholar's mind, her masculine temperament, and her passionate longing to lead her own independent life, she reminded me then of some wild, untamed creature caged behind bars.

Apart from myself she had only one other friend, Margaret Hanbury, who had been at school with her, and who possessed a nature very similar to her own. Mrs. Larrimer strongly disapproved of Margaret. She found her too mannish in manner, and too brusque in speech. She did not think her at all a suitable companion for her daughter. But Edith fought her mother over this issue—it was the only one upon which she stubbornly refused to give way—and Margaret continued to come and see them.

They had been settled in London for about three years when Mrs. Larrimer first started to show those unmistakable signs of the mortal illness that was later to carry her off. She visited several specialists, and in the end submitted to a major operation. But she never recovered sufficiently to lead anything like her old normal life. From henceforth she was to take to her bed, and live the life of a permanent invalid. Edith thus found the freedom she had so desperately longed for snatched out of her grasp. In their straitened circumstances she realised the only thing she could do was to look after her mother.

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Until Mrs. Larrimer died she could expect nothing better than the life of an unpaid companion and nurse.

Mrs. Larrimer's illness took hold of her as the worm takes hold of a piece of wood. She was riddled by it. But, as is so often the case with those of a delicate constitution, she had an iron-like resistance. Year after year she lingered on, recovering from every attack thought to be her last. She also became increasingly difficult to live with. From early morning till late at night Edith was literally run off her feet trying to comply with the other's impossible demands. Sometimes Mrs. Larrimer gave way to hysteria, and then she would make the most dreadful scenes. I had the misfortune to witness several of these, and they always ended with Mrs. Larrimer in tears, saying that her daughter had a heart of flint, and was merely counting the days for her death. It was all very distressing and pitiful. Knowing how much Edith resented this sort of emotion, and also how she detested any kind of illness, I thought she bore then with her mother's ceaseless complaints and criticism with an almost saint-like fortitude.

At that time she found her friend Margaret Hanbury the very greatest comfort. They now saw hardly anyone else, and even Mrs. Larrimer had come to rely more and more upon Margaret's visits.

Margaret had done what Edith had so longed to do. She had gone up to Cambridge and taken a degree. Then she had settled in London, near the Larrimers, and opened her own bookshop. It was the sort of establishment that catered more for the scientific and enquiring mind than for the ordinary reading public. She ran it efficiently, and made a great success of it. Almost every evening, after her work, she would come in and help Edith by sitting for an hour or two with the querulous invalid. She was thus engaged when one Sunday evening I met her for the first time. I liked her immediately. She was an extremely pleasant, intelligent, and sensible woman. She had a very downright manner, and it was obvious she was devoted to Edith. I thought she employed almost superhuman tact in her handling of Mrs. Larrimer. She had a warm, rather robust humour, and she was even able upon occasion to draw a flickering smile from Mrs. Larrimer's pale lips. It was clear that Edith loved and admired her. I felt the love she had once had for her father had been suddenly re-awakened, and transferred to Margaret. I imagined

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when Mrs. Larrimer was no more than the two friends would then set up house together. It would be a perfect arrangement, for Edith had now begun to take a very lively interest in the bookshop. What could be better, I thought, than that she, too, should go and work in it. Trying to satisfy the demands of some customer would be a great deal easier than trying to satisfy those of her mother, and turning the shelves upside down for Jenning's *British Constitution*, or Waterton's *Wanderings*, would be a pleasant change from poking about in the medicine cupboard for one of Mrs. Larrimer's new drugs.

A few years after that first meeting with Margaret, I lost touch with the Larrimers. I went to America for a rather lengthy stay, and then to France, and then the War broke out. It was only when the War was just over that I thought of them again. I had seen in *The Times* the announcement of Mrs. Larrimer's death. I wrote to Edith, and went down for the funeral. Dr. Larrimer had been buried in Winchester in the family vault, and Mrs. Larrimer had expressed the desire to be laid next to her husband. It was a melancholy occasion. There was no-one else apart from our two selves. Edith met my train, and, after the service, came to see me off again. I thought it rather odd that Margaret Hanbury had not turned up too, but I did not mention this to Edith. I felt it impertinent at that moment to probe into her private affairs. For all I knew she and Margaret may have parted, as sometimes happens between the best of friends, or, what was even more likely, Margaret may have married and settled down somewhere else. I did, however, ask Edith what she intended to do, and she said she was going to Monmouthshire for a while. I told her the change should do her good, and I rather fancied as I said so that a queer little expression came into her eyes, as though she was vaguely amused by my solicitude for her. But I meant what I said. For no woman was more in need of a change. She was just on forty, and she had spent the last twenty years without a break looking after her mother. When we said good-bye, I added that I hoped we should see something of one another from time to time. My work was now taking me a great deal out of England, and, at the moment, I had no settled home. But I gave her the address of my Club in London, and said the porter always knew where I was and forwarded my letters on to me.

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After that I wrote several times, but never had a reply. I had completely lost touch with her from that day to this.

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She came down the stairs, and walked towards me. She had taken off her beret, and brushed back her hair. She sat down, poured out our coffee, and broke off a piece of *brioche*.

"It's very nice to see you," she said. "I've often wondered what had happened to you, and whether we should ever run into one another again."

"I'm willing to bet you a fiver," I answered, "that the last place you thought we'd meet was at the Bahnhof Enge!"

"It wouldn't have crossed my mind. The Bahnhof Enge meant nothing to me. I didn't know of its existence until this morning. I told you this is the very first time I've ever been abroad."

She crumbled the piece of *brioche* between her fingers, then looked round at the hotel, with its palms, its shining windows, its freshly painted walls, and its air of quiet, solid comfort.

"It's rather like being still in a dream," she said. "I have to pinch myself to believe I'm really here."

"What made you hit on Switzerland?" I asked.

"I had always heard it was so clean, so antiseptic."

"Is that all you've come here for?"

She nodded her head, vigorously, as though that indeed was the chief reason for her coming to Switzerland.

"But you could have found those same qualities," I said, "in any London hospital!"

"They don't have large mountains in London hospitals."

She paused for a moment, then went on :

"I've longed for years to get away from the sort of air I've breathed in so long—soot, fog, grime, and sickness."

"Sickness?" I queried, a little surprised she should use the word. After all, her mother had died ten whole years ago, and her visits to the sick-room had already terminated when we last met on Winchester station.

She looked up, and that indifferent manner at last fell from her.

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"I've been haunted by it," she whispered. "I can't think why. It's not as though I ever had a vocation for it. I never asked for that sort of life."

I have always a slight feeling of irritation when someone leaves you to guess at his true meaning by resorting to innuendoes instead of making a simple, straightforward statement. It is often the habit of those addicted to self-pity. I should certainly never have suspected Edith of succumbing to it. I suddenly felt impatient and out of sympathy with her.

"You can't imagine what it is like," she went on, "or how it gets you down. To feel there's nothing but decay and corruption in everything you look at, everything you touch."

"I don't understand what you're talking about," I said.

She looked at me with blank astonishment.

"But you knew, didn't you?"

"Knew what?"

"Why, about Margaret, of course."

"No. What happened to her?"

"She went down with the same thing that killed my mother. Went down with it only a few months before my mother died of it. I thought I told you, that day at Winchester, when we last met."

"You never said a word about it."

"Didn't I tell you I was going up to Monmouthshire?"

"Yes. But you didn't tell me why."

"I went up to nurse Margaret. She had sold the bookshop in London, and taken a cottage up there."

"What rotten luck," I murmured, and was immediately conscious of the hopeless inadequacy of the phrase.

"Yes, wasn't it?" she said. "Wasn't it rotten luck!"

She deliberately flung those inane words back at me, as though, by repeating them, she could make me more fully understand the tragedy which had overtaken her friend.

"I suppose she was luckier than my mother. *She* took twenty years to die. Margaret took only ten. She died this year. Six months ago."

There was such heartbreak in her voice, such a tremor, that I fully

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expected her to burst into a flood of tears there and then before me. But she remained quite still, and suddenly that old air of reserve took hold of her once more. She stared straight ahead of her, just crumbling to fine powder the little piece of *brioche* that remained between her fingers.

"What hell it must have been for you," I said.

"It was infinitely worse for her. She wasn't frail and feminine like my mother. Margaret loathed sickness as much as I do. But she managed somehow to keep a sense of proportion right to the very end."

I suddenly felt bitterly ashamed of my attitude a few minutes ago. It gave me an intense feeling of pain to think of those two women, shut away in that cottage up in Monmouthshire, struggling week after week, year after year, not to give way to their true feelings, keeping up a daily pretence with one another, each being slowly crucified.

Edith's expression suddenly changed. It was no longer so dispassionate. It was almost sardonic.

"It used to astonish me during the War at all the fuss that went on, in the newspapers, and on the radio, when some new disaster was given out. I used to think then how little most of us really care about those other private disasters which go on in ordinary daily life, and which aren't so loudly publicised. Everyone in the village, for example, knew just how ill Margaret was. But they didn't waste much sympathy on her. Humanity can sometimes be intolerably callous."

She was silent for a while, then went on again, in that old, off-hand manners of hers.

"Probably I exaggerate. It's never easy to recapture exactly what one has felt. But I suppose the strongest feeling I had was one of resentment. Margaret was such a brilliant, such an exceptional person. She was so useful. She was worth hundreds who don't matter. And yet, she had to go through all that. Ten years is such a long time. For someone, that is, who thinks and feels."

"I imagine there were days when she had some sort of respite."

"They were few and far between."

Her bitter resentment of what had happened now detached itself

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from Maragaret, and seemed almost to fasten itself on me, so that I felt acutely conscious of my own good health.

"She was lucky," I murmured, "to have you. There was always a great bond between you."

She gave me that sardonic look again.

"What do you think becomes of affection when it knows it is powerless to effect any good? When you see, day after day, the person you're devoted to getting steadily worse?"

"I think your attitude is all wrong," I exclaimed.

"Do you?" she answered.

"I know this, that if I were afflicted like that, I should take infinite comfort from the fact that someone who was attached to me was near me."

"That's what everyone thinks."

"Everyone is right."

"Well, perhaps there are some exceptions that prove the rule."

"I find it hard to believe they exist."

"You don't seem to understand," she went on, "how much we both hated any kind of sickness. It was a contingency we neither of us ever imagined we should have to face in our own lives."

"I understand that perfectly well," I answered. "But in such a situation there comes a time—there must, surely—when you cease to cling to your own point of view, when you are forced to make a compromise."

"I used to pray that would happen," she said. "But I could never overcome my own feelings. And nor could she. Her real suffering wasn't her own agonising pain. It was *me*."

"I imagine you tried to hide what you were feeling from her?"

"Naturally. I am not completely inhuman. But she wasn't fooled. Sometimes, when she lapsed into moments of coma, she would talk away to herself. I knew then that what I had thought I had hidden she had been fully aware of all the time."

She paused again. It was strange to hear her stripping her emotion so naked before me, and at the same time maintaining that indifferent attitude of speech.

"It would have been so much easier had I not loved her. But I suppose love betrays one's innermost thoughts, whether those thoughts

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are spoken or not. I couldn't bear to know there was nothing I could do for her, except help a little to postpone her date of departure. Looking back now, I don't think she was particularly grateful to me. She didn't fight for life as my mother had done. There was no reason why my mother should live, and so I suppose there was also no reason why she should die. But Margaret had nothing left to live for."

"She had you," I reminded her.

"Oh, she never loved me as I loved her. She loved her work. She was fond of me. But her bookshop was the passion of her life. Once that was taken away from her, and she knew she could never get well again, she had no will to live."

I thought again of the unhappiness that must have existed all those years in that cottage up in the wilds of Monmouthshire. Margaret longing only to be gone as speedily as possible, craving for a final end to it all. And Edith, devotedly looking after her, seeing for the second time in her life the thing she so passionately wanted being taken away from her, nursing her friend with the utmost selflessness, and yet unable to overcome her detestation of those trimmings, so intimate and yet so repulsive, which are of necessity always connected with disease. I looked again at her, sitting opposite me, and wondered how that battle that had gone on for so long, that desire to hold, and at the same time to be free, would eventually work itself out.

"Have you any plans?" I asked.

"None."

I paused before asking the question I wished to ask, then nervously asked it.

"How are you off for money?"

"I'm quite rich," she said. "Margaret was very well off. She left me everything."

"Then you don't have to look for a job."

"No. I'm completely free. For the first time."

She paused again, as though momentarily embarrassed, then went on :

"When my mother was ill I longed for nothing more than the day when I should have a life of my own. When Margaret was attacked by the same thing I tried all I could to keep that old longing for

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freedom out of my mind. It seemed so appallingly disloyal. But I couldn't prevent the thought from constantly coming back to me. It was like fighting the devil to keep myself from thinking that way. But the devil always won. It's an odd thing how we talk of love and devotion and how, in the end, it is usually of oneself that one thinks. I used to despise myself. I couldn't bear the thought of Margaret going. But, at the same time, I couldn't bear to be tied any longer. So when I tell you now I am free for the first time in my life, you realise at what cost to my heart and my conscience I have won that freedom."

I remained silent, and those frosty, honest eyes of hers searched my own.

"I have only talked to you like this because, after Margaret, I suppose I know you better than anyone else."

"I am touched you should feel like that about me."

"If I sound bitter, it is for a perfectly good reason. You knew what Margaret meant to me. If it hadn't been for this wretched disease we should have been so happy together. We had made so many plans. We weren't to know then they would all come to nothing. But I suppose life is like that. Most things turn to ashes. We live on delusion."

I suddenly felt I could not endure to hear her go on in this strain of mingled self-reproach and cynicism. If she felt like this now she would certainly feel a great deal worse sitting by herself for all those weeks in some cut-off mountain village miles from anywhere.

"I'm going to Vienna to-morrow," I said. "I have business to do there that'll keep me occupied for the next fortnight. Why don't you change your plans, and come with me? Vienna is an enchanting place. It has great atmosphere. You are more likely to enjoy yourself there than in this place you've decided to go to."

"It's kind of you to suggest it," she said. "But I think I'll stick to my original plan."

"Why?"

"I need that antiseptic something that only the mountains can give me. I want to get that feeling of sickness out of my system."

"I've never heard of this place Engelhaus," I went on. "I'm pretty sure you'll find it damned dull."

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" Maybe. But I'm not in need of entertainment. I shall go for long walks."

" Alone ? "

" Of course."

" You can't walk very far in thick snow."

She smiled at my irritation.

" I shall buy myself a pair of stout boots, and some ski-ing trousers. I'll walk for miles."

" You'll probably fall down some ravine, or die of exposure."

" I think that's unlikely."

Her eyes calmly searched my own again.

" I truly believe the thing I'm going to enjoy more than anything else these next few weeks is that sense of freedom I spoke of just now."

It was then I suddenly made one of those impulsive decisions I sometimes fall prey to.

" I'm doing nothing for Christmas. If the idea amuses you, I'll come back from Vienna on the twenty-third, and join you up there at this godforsaken place."

A sparkle suddenly came into her eyes. It was the first time she had shown the slightest animation.

" What a lovely idea ! And perhaps you can stay on for the New Year ! "

" Then that's a date," I said. " But you must tell me exactly how I get to this place. And, if it isn't asking too much, I should be fascinated to know how you ever got to hear of it."

" I simply walked into a Travel Agency in London," she answered, " and told the first person I saw at the counter that I wanted to go up in the mountains to some place where there weren't too many tourists. He immediately suggested Engelhaus. He seemed to know it quite well. He said he was sure I would like it."

That was more, I thought to myself, than I was likely to do. Yet now that I had made this snap decision to join her, I felt an odd sense of relief. When we rose from the table to take a short stroll down by the lake it was as though a weight had been lifted from me. Instinct is sometimes more rewarding than rationalism, and in a flash you can find yourself put on a better course than that dictated by weeks,

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even months, of arduously reasoned thought. I was quite sure my instinct had led me to do the right thing.



I thought a great deal about Edith whilst I was in Vienna. I visualised her in her mountain fastness, tramping through the snow in those stout boots she had decided to buy, and wondered how she was getting on stuck up there all alone with no company except a few hotel guests, the villagers, and the chamois. I hoped she was enjoying her freedom. I am not very sentimental by nature, but somehow, during those days in Vienna, whenever I thought of Edith, a lump came into my throat. Life, for all these years, had really given her such a poor deal. It was a comfort, however, to know Margaret Hanbury had left her so well off. I hoped she would now make up for lost time, and have a real fling. Oddly enough, I found myself greatly looking forward to spending Christmas with her. It was as though, for a few days, those first years of our friendship were being given back to us. At fifty, we would scramble about the mountains just as, at fifteen, we had set off on those long walks over the Dorset downs. We would recapture something we had both lost.

Passing through the Viennese streets I found myself keeping a sharp look-out in the shop-windows for any little odd gift I could present her with on Christmas Day. In the *Kohlmarkt* I bought her a bag of Russian leather such as you only find in Vienna, in the *Graben* I bought her some rather attractive handkerchiefs, and in the *Kärtnerstrasse* I bought her a large bottle of scent. Then, one evening, walking back through the *Christkindlmarkt*, with its naphtha flares, its merry stalls piled high with Christmas things, and everyone looking as though they had come straight out of a Breughel picture, I found myself irresistibly compelled to buy some of the tinselly things displayed—an angel cut out of stiff gold paper, a brilliant star wonderfully woven of silver thread, an old Carinthian head-shawl, and a huge box of crackers. The spirit of Christmas entered into me as it had not done for many years. I saw myself getting out of the train near St. Moritz and driving up to Engelhaus in a sledge, hugging my numerous parcels, and looking exactly like St. Niklaus. It was a pleasant mental image.

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And then, the day before I was due to leave Vienna, I did the most idiotic thing. Hurrying past the Hofburg, I suddenly stumbled on the icy cobbles, fell down, and broke my ankle.

There was no hope now of my going to join Edith. Instead of spending the holiday with her I spent it by myself in a room in St. Stefan's Hospital overlooking the Danube. The fracture was a compound one. It was unlikely I should be on my feet again for some weeks.

I wrote to her explaining what had happened, and she sent back a long letter. Most of it was taken up by her enthusiastic description of the mountains, the great valley, and the little inn where she had been given such comfortable rooms. She said she would never have believed she could be so happy as she was in Engelhaus. She was sad to hear of my mishap, but suggested when I was well enough to leave Vienna that I should still join her, if only for two or three days. She intended to stay on where she was for several months. She thought the spring up there should be worth waiting for. I wrote back and said I should like nothing better than to do as she suggested.



I arrived late on a Sunday afternoon in the middle of February, and was surprised not to find Edith at the inn. They told me she had gone for a walk, but should be back at any minute. I went to my room, unpacked my things, then hobbled out on the terrace to wait for her.

The journey from Vienna had been a tiresome one. I had been unable to get a sleeper, and so had sat up all night. Then, after Zurich, there had been a great many changes, and for every new connection I had either to make a wild rush, or stand hanging about. I was dog-tired. I also felt somewhat disgruntled with Edith. I had wired the exact time of my arrival, and, in Switzerland, one usually arrives when one is meant to. I thought she could very easily have put off her walk that one afternoon and taken the trouble to meet me.

My temper was in no way improved by the first glimpse I now had of the place I had come to, for, just as I had originally suspected, Engelhaus was the most dreary little village. It was perched up against a

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solid wall of rock, and you had the feeling that at any moment the whole gimcrack place would topple over and go hurtling down into the valley far below. It was over-shadowed by some of the highest, and least attractive, mountains of the Engadine. There were none of those gentle wooded slopes and quiet mossy ravines which you associate with other Swiss mountain villages. It had been an extremely mild winter, and there was very little snow, so that the bleakness of the place was quite undisguised. It was simply bare rock wherever you looked. Down in the valley, however, there were forests, a long, winding river, and several small hamlets. I decided I would spend as much time as I could down there and only come back at night to this eyrie for the purpose of putting my head on a pillow and going to sleep. I could not, for the life of me, understand why Edith had written those long panegyrics about the place, nor why she should have wished to stay on longer.

Then the innkeeper came out of his *stube*, introduced himself, and stood beside me on the terrace. The Swiss are not remarkable for their physical beauty, but this fellow was like a Greek god. His good looks simply bowled you over. He was about thirty-five, and well over six foot. He had broad shoulders, narrow hips, jet black curly hair, a perfect profile, and very blue, wide-spaced eyes. His skin was clear, and the colour of honey. The sleeves of his woollen jersey were rolled up to the elbow, and revealed a most muscular forearm. He was a perfect specimen of radiant good health. When he spoke to me, I found his dialect hard to follow, but he had such charm of manner, such a way of putting you at your ease, that it was a pure delight to find yourself talking to him.

"It's a wonderful view, isn't it?" he said. "In the winter we don't have many tourists. But in summer they all come pouring up here to look at this view."

He paused, then went on again.

"Your friend, Miss Larrimer, is in love with the place. She has walked everywhere since she came here. There isn't a path she doesn't now know. Every evening she comes out on to this terrace to look again at the view. She says it is the finest view she ever saw. She's so nice. We are so happy to have her up here with us. We have never had anyone so nice staying here with us before."

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He went on talking about her, how strong she was, what amazing powers of endurance she possessed, how she could easily outdistance any of the guides when she went on a climb, how she had absolutely no sense of fear, and as he continued with his eulogy I saw how genuinely he admired her. His praise of her astonished me. He seemed to be almost carried away by it.

I suddenly felt rather cold.

"Is there a sitting-room in the hotel?" I asked. "It's not too warm out here."

He gave me a broad grin.

"You are less hardy than our friend Miss Larrimer."

His easy use of the pronoun amused me. Edith had certainly made a great impression on him.

"When she returns will you tell her I am indoors?"

"But here she is," he answered, "coming down the hill. She's been again for her usual walk, I suppose, up to the glacier."

I followed the direction of his hand, and saw Edith striding down the road. Only an Englishwoman, I thought, could walk about on a mountain top in mid-winter dressed like that. She wore a tweed skirt and an open shirt. She suddenly caught sight of me, waved, and walked faster. A moment later she stood beside me.

"How nice you could come," she said.

She greeted me more warmly than she had ever done before. There was no suggestion of that old aloof manner, and ten weeks of this mountain air had wrought a great change in her appearance. Her eyes shone, and her cheeks glowed. Even those wisps of hair had now disappeared. She looked ten years younger.

The innkeeper moved a step nearer to her, gave her that friendly grin of his, and said :

"What is it to be this evening? The same as usual?"

She smiled back at him. Was it only my fancy, or was that expression of hers more tender than I had ever seen it before?

"What else could it be?" she said. "Only you must make two, instead of one."

"You think your friend will like it?"

"Of course."

He looked anxiously at me.

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"He might perhaps find it too strong."

She laughed, and there was something infectious and completely carefree in the sound of her laughter.

"My dear Anton," she said, "it is the best drink in the world." Then she turned to me. "He makes the most wonderful drink of *eau-de-vie*. He mixes something else with it. But he won't tell me what it is. As you are a man, he might think you are more worthy to be taken into his confidence than I am. But I assure you it is quite excellent. It has become my nightly tipple."

The innkeeper blushed, smiled shyly back at me, then disappeared again into his *stube*.

"He is such a darling," she said. "In fact, they all are. They are the nicest, kindest people in the world. You've no idea how good they've all been to me."

They might all have been good to her, I thought, but it struck me as pretty obvious that Anton was the one she singled out for the highest praise. It really was quite an entertaining situation, Edith at fifty and this wonderful looking young peasant, so many years her junior.

We went indoors, sat in the little pine-panelled parlour, and drank the burning liquid Anton had concocted for us. It ran down my throat like fire. I had never drunk anything so fierce. Vodka was like mother's milk in comparison with it. But it certainly warmed one. And five minutes later, with that same anxious, shy smile, he brought us another two glasses.

There was one of those old-fashioned stoves built into the wall, and we sat beside it. What with the heat coming out of the tiles, and that drink inside me, I began to feel a very pleasant glow. My first impression of the place gradually thawed away.

We had a simple dinner, and drank with it a bottle of rough wine, then went back to the little parlour. Edith told me Anton had insisted she should have it as her own private sitting-room, and refused to charge her extra for it. With her bedroom leading off it, and the bath next door, she had quite a little suite of her own. She had filled the sitting-room with pot plants and books, and it was really very cosy. Our coffee was brought to us there, and she called for two glasses of the local liqueur. She had learnt, I thought, to do herself rather well. Then she opened a box of Havana cigars, and offered me one.

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I was surprised by the cigars.

"Have you taken to smoking these?" I asked.

"No," she said. "But sometimes of an evening Anton joins me in here. He adores cigars. It seems a small enough return for all his kindness."

I thought of that Greek god sitting at ease in one of her chairs, with his feet probably stuck up on the tiled ledge of the stove, puffing away at his cigar, and suddenly wondered whether Edith, in this first flush of freedom, had not somewhat lost her sense of proportion. But she looked so absurdly content that I was the last to grudge her this new happiness she had found.

"And so you've decided to stay on awhile," I said.

"Until the beginning of summer," she answered.

"And, after that?"

"I hope the chalet will be finished."

"What chalet?"

"The one I'm building up here."

"You mean," I exclaimed, "you're going to *settle* up here?"

Her eyes calmly met my own.

"Why not? I'm never likely to find another place that I shall like half so well."

I passed my hand over my forehead.

"But, do you honestly mean to say you're going to live here for ever?"

"Yes," she said. "I shall go back to England at the end of April, and sort out the things I want to keep, then ship them over here. I hope to be settled by the autumn."

I remained silent for a few moments, then glanced again at her. She sat with her head slightly turned away from me finishing her glass of liqueur. There was a something, an air about her, that I found it hard to define.

"Well," I said at last, "I hope you'll be very happy up here."

"I'm sure I shall be," she replied.

And then there was a gentle knock on the door, and Anton walked into the room. Without being invited to do so, he went over to the box of cigars, took one out, cut off the end, put it in his mouth, lit it, then sat down in the chair beside her.

"You've shut down early to-night," she said.

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"Sunday evening," he answered. "They never stay late on a Sunday."

The three of us sat on in that small, overheated room for perhaps half-an-hour. Once he got up to take away her empty glass. Before he sat down again he paused by her chair to straighten the cushion behind her head. It was a very charming, unsolicited gesture. I finished my cigar, and listened to the pair of them. By the easy, intimate way they had with one another you would have fancied they had known each other for years. My own long-standing friendship with Edith suddenly seemed of no account. I might, in fact, have been a total stranger. Anyhow, they appeared to be quite oblivious of my presence. The whole thing was so unexpected, so utterly fantastic. Their relationship, of course, was as plain as a pikestaff. I only wondered that I had not guessed it the very first moment I saw them together, that afternoon when she returned from her walk. It was because of him, of course, that she was building herself this chalet, and permanently settling up here. He had got hold of her in the easiest possible way. He had simply caught her on the rebound. After thirty years' close confinement with the sick and the dying she had fallen for the first healthy specimen to come her way. It was that godlike beauty, that incredible muscular strength, that had won her heart and captured her imagination. Despite the great difference in their age it was difficult to blame her. Few women would have been able to resist Anton as a lover. But it was a queer end to her life. I wondered what Margaret Hanbury would have thought of the situation. With her robust sense of humour I think she would have been greatly entertained. It was the very last thing any of us would have expected, the thought of old Dr. Larrimer's daughter living with a Swiss peasant high up in the Swiss Alps!

They turned to me, and suddenly drew me into their talk. I gathered they were making some sort of plan to go down to the valley the next morning.

"We'll have to leave fairly early," Edith said. "I hope after your long journey here you're not too tired to come with us?"

"I'll fall in," I said, "with whatever you wish."

"We'll have to leave about nine," she went on. "Do you think you can have the jeep ready for us by then, Anton?"

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"It'll be here," he answered, "just as the church clock strikes the hour!"

She smiled back at him, and said :

"Well, I suppose we had all better go to bed now if we're to make such an early start."

He took the hint, and leapt to his feet at once, then went over to the window, opened it, and threw out the butt of his cigar. The cold night air blew into the room, and I found it very welcome.

With that broad, cheerful grin of his, he bade us good-night, then left us.

Her eyes followed him out of the room.

"His looks are staggering, don't you think?" she said, turning again to me.

"Quite extraordinary," I replied. "He'd make a fortune in the cinema."

She frowned.

"He'd be like a fish out of water away from this place."

She walked up the stairs with me to my room, and, after we had said good-night, suddenly paused with her hand on the door. Then she shut it again, and came back into the room.

"There's a lot I've got to talk over with you," she said. "But there's one thing I may as well tell you now. I'm building this chalet, and remaining up here, because I'm going to get married."

There was a slight tremor in her voice, and she looked a little away from me, as though she did not want to witness my first reaction to that flat statement. Then those honest eyes of hers looked again straight into my own.

"That is why we are going down to the valley to-morrow morning. I waited, actually, until you should come from Vienna. I want you to give me away."

I went over to her, and kissed her.

"I wish you every happiness," I said.

She pressed my hand, then left me.



We got into the jeep, the three of us on the front seat, with Edith sitting between us. She wore a grey coat and skirt. Anton had put

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on a blue suit. He had an *edelweiss* in his button-hole. But the formal attire did not become him. He looked much better in that old jersey he had worn the night before. The road was in poor condition, and there was one hairpin bend after another. He drove well, but extremely fast. Neither he nor Edith seemed to mind in the very least those jagged precipices that revealed themselves at every corner. I shut my eyes, and prayed we would safely reach the valley. It took us about two hours to get down, and it was with relief that I felt the tyres moving smoothly again over a macadam road.

We stopped in the first hamlet. It was no bigger than Engelhaus, but was obviously not so much off the map, for I saw what looked like several large hotels peering through the pine trees. Anton went into the *Rathaus*, an elegant little Baroque building beside the river, whilst we waited for him to come out again. Edith sat beside me, but said nothing. Her thoughts seemed miles away. I wondered what the morning's procedure would be, what time they had fixed the ceremony, and whether it was to be a civil or a religious one. Then Anton joined us again, with some papers in his hand, and we drove off once more. To my surprise we drove out of the village, then suddenly took a steep road leading up through the woods. It seemed as though he was making for one of those large hotels. Then he entered a private drive, and I saw that in fact was what he was doing. We drove along an avenue of larch and birch, then suddenly the enormous façade of the hotel appeared before us.

We got out of the jeep, and were immediately greeted by two men in black morning coats. They had an air of great formality. They bent over Edith's hand, muttered something I could not hear, then moved off with her into the hall. Anton and I remained standing by the jeep. Then Edith called to us, and we all walked together to the lift. We were carried up to what seemed to be the top floor, then marched along a corridor, and then ushered through a door. I suddenly felt as though I were in a dream. For, instead of finding myself in some hotel room, I found myself in a ward in which there were several beds, and three large french windows that led out to a balcony upon which there were even more beds. The place we had come to was not an hotel at all. It was a sanatorium.

I followed Edith and Anton over to the bed furthest away from

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us, and, with something akin to stupefaction, gazed down at the man looking up at us. He was deathly pale, and in that white, drawn face, the immense liquid black eyes seemed of a fantastic size. He stretched out a delicate arm towards Edith.

"How punctual you are, my darling," he said.

Edith turned to me, and introduced us.

"This is Carl, Anton's elder brother," she said. "He has to remain in here for four more months. But he wanted to marry me before I went back to England. When he comes out the chalet will be ready for both of us. We shall have our own home to go to."

Like Anton's, it was a face of great beauty, only cast in an infinitely more sensitive mould. He had a smile of piercing sweetness.

Those immense, questioning eyes looked up into my own.

"Edith has told me all about you," he said. "Do you think we are very silly not to wait until I am out of here? But I am the one who is impatient. I told her I wouldn't remain shut up here for all these months unless she married me."

"Carl is quite right," she said. "It really makes no difference whether we are married now, before he comes out of the sanatorium, or much later."

I said nothing. There was literally nothing I could say. My head was in a complete whirl. Still as though in a dream, I watched Anton, with that extraordinary tenderness of his, help his brother into a warm dressing-gown, then support that frail body with his own strong arm and lead him into the lift with the rest of us. We descended to the ground floor, and there, in the reception room, amongst a bower of lilies, I saw Edith and Carl joined together as man and wife.



That same evening, before dinner, Edith and I sat out on the terrace up at Engelhaus. We looked at the twinkling lights of all the sanatoria in the valley down below. Anton brought us his famous drink, then left us to talk.

"When did you first meet him?" I asked.

"Carl? Why, in London."

"In London!" I exclaimed.

"Don't you remember my telling you that I went into a Travel

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Agency in London and asked the first person I saw behind the counter where I should go to up in the mountains, and how he told me to come to Engelhaus? That was Carl."

"Well," I went on, "and when did you see him again?"

"He came here for Christmas, to be with Anton. We both immediately realised how ill he was. But Carl refused to listen to a word we told him. He simply wouldn't go and see a doctor. It seems he's always had this wretched tubercular lung, ever since he was small. Last year they sent him away from Davos, and said he was cured. He thought he would leave Switzerland for a while. He had worked for some time, on and off, in a big Travel Agency at St. Moritz. And so they allowed him to make a change with his opposite number in London. That was how he happened to be in England. But he never felt really well in London. That day I remember, when we first met, I thought he was coughing far too much. I told him then he should take better care of himself. But he just gave me that enchanting smile of his, and said he looked after himself perfectly well. But, when he came here for Christmas, both Anton and I were really worried about him. He would come walking with me. He refused to stay indoors. There was simply nothing we could do about him. He has a very strong will."

"And then?" I prompted her.

"Why, then he asked me one day to marry him. I said I would—but only on one condition. That he allowed himself to be cured. And that he allowed me to help him towards a cure."

"How long will it take?" I asked.

She shrugged.

"One never knows. But up here, in this wonderful air, with me to look after him, he stands a better chance I think than he would otherwise."

I looked at her for a moment, and she steadily returned my gaze.

"Your freedom didn't last very long," I said.

"But don't you understand," she exclaimed, "I've only just found it!"

"Have you?"

"Yes. The *perfect* freedom. For, when we're together in our own home, I shan't have a moment to think of myself. I shall only have

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time to think of him. I shall be busy from morning till night. And that, I assure you, is the best sort of freedom."

We finished our drink, and as I followed her in to dinner I had a feeling that perhaps, in her own, odd, dedicated way, she had really hit the nail right on the head.

To the North

BY MAY SARTON

We have come back to the cold North,
Come home after the passionate going forth,
After the olive groves, the Alpine meadow,
The purple seas under a mountain shadow,
The rich and crumbling ruins in the hills,
Those storms of light in the psychic cathedrals,
After the passionate summer going forth,
We have come back to the cold North.

We have come at the year's turning,
Before the leaves fall, when the leaves are burning,
Before the apples, the late roses fall,
When all is empty and yet bountiful.
We have cried "Beauty, Beauty!" up and down,
But that restless pursuit is overthrown,
And Beauty turned to ashes in the mouth,
Consumed by the consuming South.

Oh splendid was that spendthrift living,
The quick growth in the South, the over-giving,
But ripeness tumbles swiftly into ruin
And death is there under that awful sun,
The fig bursting with sweetness, the grape broken,
And every word too heavy that is spoken—
And we come back now, silenced, to this earth
To bind up selfhood in the North.

